The Activity of Being

AN ESSAY ON ARISTOTLE'S ONTOLOGY

Aryeh Kosman

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Preface

This book began a number of years ago when I set out to collect some papers about Aristotle that I had written—papers that are scattered in various journals and collections—and to read them with a former student. In the course of the collection and subsequent reading, I was struck by several ideas that informed these papers, ideas that I still thought to be good ideas and of interest, but ideas that wanted development, both in themselves and in relation to one another. The first concerned the role in Aristotle's thinking of the notion of *energeia* (*ἐνέργεια*). I had discussed this notion in particular in two much earlier papers. In one, I had argued that a proper understanding of Aristotle's account of motion depended upon recognizing that motion is a species of *energeia,* and in another, that this recognition would enable us to understand the critical role of *energeia* in the argument of the *Metaphysics.*

But in these early papers I had not properly understood the nature of *energeia,* nor, as a consequence, had I understood its role in Aristotle's argument. What I saw as an emblem of my misunderstanding, or perhaps as constitutive of it, or perhaps as a cause of it, was the fact that I had, like most people, almost always rendered *energeia* in English as *actuality.* I was in good company in this choice of translation, but I had come to recognize it as a mistake. That recognition had not come all at once. In

1984, I allowed in a footnote that "I'd like 'activity' to be heard throughout my readings of 'actuality.'"[1] But in later papers I was more resolute. I recognized that Aristotle's ontology requires us to read *energeia* as a mode of *activity*. The translation of *energeia* as *actuality* fostered the representation of that concept in modal terms, terms that contrast the *actual* with the merely potential and lead us to think of realization as the making actual of a *possibility*. That representation, I came to see, obscures what is fundamental in Aristotle, and it must yield to one in which the paradigmatic realization is the *exercise of a capacity*.

I initially set out in this work to consider the role that *energeia* must be seen to play once that mistake has been corrected. My aim was to explore Aristotle's understanding of *activity* and to reveal the centrality of that understanding to his developed ontology, where by *activity* I mean to designate what is expressed in Aristotle's Greek by the term *energeia*. Along the way the work became, for better or worse, a more ambitious and a more general interpretation of Aristotle's ontology; and that is what this essay is.

My practice of using, for the most part, *activity* to translate *energeia* and *ability* or *capacity* to translate its correspondent term *dunamis* is not unique, but it replaces the much more common practice of English translation and scholarship to which I referred above and which I had earlier followed, the practice that renders *energeia* as *actuality* and *dunamis* as *potentiality*.

This customary practice, as I indicated, skews our understanding of Aristotle. It leads to an emphasis on notions of *change* and *otherness* rather than what are for Aristotle the conceptually and ontologically prior notions of *being* and *self-identity*. By so doing—by emphasizing *becoming* rather than *being, potentialities* and their *actualization* rather than *capacities* and their *exercise*—it has contributed to a subtle misreading of Aristotle's argument, most centrally in the *Metaphysics* but throughout his writing in general.

The translations of *energeia* by *activity* and *dunamis* by *ability* or *capacity* are of course not perfect. No choice for rendering these terms in English could hope to be completely satisfactory, for they have no exact English counterpart. A widespread but not always happy strategy of translators in dealing with the fact that there is rarely perfect semantic

congruity between terms of different languages is the use of different words in different contexts to render the complex semantic field of a foreign term relative to English. Such a strategy purchases felicity in particular contexts at the cost of obscuring a larger argument. Sometimes that obscuring is limited to a specific text; translations of Plato's *Charmides,* for example, faced with the formidable task of representing *σωφροσύνη (sophrosyne)* in English may use different translations of the term throughout the course of the dialogue, revealing perhaps more clearly the sense of each passage but obscuring the larger progression of Plato's argument.[2]

Sometimes the obscuring occurs on a much larger scale. The translation, for example, of Aristotle's Greek *ousia* as *substance* contrasts with a common (and rather happier) translation of that term in Plato's dialogues as *being.* Whatever one may think of the superiority of one or the other translation, even given different contexts, the shift masks an important continuity in thought from Plato to Aristotle. The Greekless reader has little sense of the fact that Aristotle's inquiry into *substance* is a sequel to and continuation of aspects of Plato's concern with *being,* and that the question of the *Metaphysics* concerning the nature of substance is a cousin to questions asked throughout the dialogues concerning the nature of being.

Still, it is tempting to employ this strategy, and to render *energeia* sometimes as *activity* and other times as *actuality.* It is also tempting to finesse the issue of translation altogether by using Aristotle's own term *energeia.* But I intend to resist these temptations, and to avoid strategies that might thus obscure the force of Aristotle's argument for the English-speaking reader. And since a central part of my argument will be that *activity* is, all things considered, the best English translation of Aristotle's term, it is the translation I will standardly use. I hope to make it convincing.

The question of how best to translate *energeia* is, as should be obvious, an issue of philosophical interpretation and not merely, as it were, of rhetorical felicity. The translation of philosophical terms so shapes our reading and our thinking as a hermeneutical community as to inform globally the interpretive and theoretical understanding of substantive views. Consider a parallel case with another of Aristotle's terms. For many years, it was standard to translate *episteme* (*ἐπιστήμη*) by *knowledge,*

particularly in translations and discussions of the *Posterior Analytics.* Several studies then appeared suggesting that we should rather translate the term by *understanding.*[3] This retranslation was no mere rhetorical tinkering; it constituted a significant shift in our thinking about Aristotle's theory of scientific discourse, particularly in the *Posterior Analytics,* and it affected our view, for the better, of an entire range of issues surrounding his concept of *episteme* not just in that work, but in a variety of other contexts in which he discusses or relies on the concept. So, I hope to show, will the retranslation of *energeia* by *activity* affect for the better our view of Aristotle's ontology.

I have been more conservative in my translation of the Greek terms *ousia* (*οὐσία*) and *kinesis* (*κίνησις*). In the former case, I have retained the traditional *substance* despite the fact that it masks the origins of *ousia* in the Greek verb *to be. Substance* has by now acquired such authority in its own right that it would be a mistake to abandon it. In the meanwhile, *being* and *essence,* the two obvious rivals to *substance,* have been drafted into other roles. In the latter case, I have continued the traditional translation of *kinesis* as *motion* and continued to use *move* as a translation of the verb *kineo* (*κινέω*), even though these translations conceal somewhat the degree to which, in using these terms, Aristotle means to be speaking of *change.* But that decision is in a sense his, for it is his choice to use motion as a model of change. The choice is an interesting one, and as we will see, connected with his understanding of the complex relations between motion, change, activity, and being. In a sense, Aristotle's use of motion as a model of change parallels his use of *activity* as a model of being.[4]

It is primarily that use that I want the translations of *energeia* and *dunamis* to reveal. In proposing *activity* and *ability* as translations of these terms, I am offering an interpretation of *energeia as* activity and of *dunamis as* ability, and this is to offer an interpretation of Aristotle's theory of *being* as informed by these notions. It will, I hope, become clear why the notions of *activity* and *ability* are central to Aristotle's ontology and why it is accordingly appropriate to read that ontology as one for which a central and governing concept is that of *the activity of being.*

It is of course true that this thought—the thought that a proper understanding of *energeia* is critical to an understanding of being—is not an arcane thought that I pretend to have discovered. It is, as I hope to show,

on the surface of Aristotle's text. And it has not gone unnoticed by Aristotle's commentators, but has been recognized by much of the interpretive tradition. Think, for example, of the importance that *act* plays in the reading of Aristotle that forms the heart of Thomas Aquinas's ontology. Nor is it the case—and Aquinas is here again to the point historically—that my reading of *energeia* as activity is unique. In recent years in particular, several discussions of *Metaphysics* Theta have argued for this translation.[5] But it seems to me that these connected features of Aristotle's ontology—the centrality of *energeia* and its character as *activity*—have become obscured and misunderstood in our discussions of Aristotle in the last century, and therefore need reemphasis and a contemporary elaboration. They need, moreover, to be integrated into an argument not just about Book 9, but about the *Metaphysics* as a whole, and indeed about Aristotle's ontology as a whole.

In speaking of *the Metaphysics as a whole* I am clearly taking liberties. It is not obvious that the collection of treatises gathered together under the title *Metaphysics* was intended to constitute a single and unified whole. If there is such a unity, obviously some books are not part of it, and scholars who believe that there is a unity disagree on what books belong and why. But in this study, I read the *Metaphysics* as mostly a single work, with an agenda and with a connected set of arguments. I realize that this is not an approach to the text that is universally accepted, and that from a historical and critically scientific point of view, I may be thought to owe evidence to justify that approach. But my decision to do so is a decision to read Aristotle from within an older hermeneutical tradition that did much to shape western philosophy.

I begin this book by rehearsing briefly in Chapter 1 the well-attested fact that the being of substance is thought by Aristotle to explain being in general. Then I sketch the outlines of an argument to show why it is that *energeia* understood as activity is so central to Aristotle's understanding of substance. In Chapter 2, I begin to explicate the meaning of *energeia* as activity by attending to the distinction that Aristotle draws in the *Metaphysics* between motion and *energeia* and to the related account of motion in the *Physics*. In Chapter 3, I argue that understanding *energeia* as activity helps us understand its use by Aristotle to explicate the nature and unity of substance. I then explore further the nature of *energeia* as

activity by attending to some of the consequences of this understanding in our reading of Aristotle's thought in the *Metaphysics* and elsewhere. In Chapter 4, I show how activity and its use to explain the unity of substance are connected to the central place Aristotle accords animal being. I argue that the distinction between animals and artifacts is an important one for Aristotle, and is connected to his understanding of the essential activity of substance. In Chapters 5 and 6, I explicate further the nature of this activity and of the general relation between substance and essence, arguing that for Aristotle the basic activity of substance is the activity of *essence,* which I explain as various modes of something *being what it is.* In Chapters 7 and 8, I relate the account of activity to Aristotle's theory of the divine. I first suggest why a proper account of *energeia* may help us understand the various things Aristotle says about the prime mover. I then consider the account of divine activity in Book 12 of the *Metaphysics,* particularly in relation to Aristotle's account of thought as divine. Finally, in Chapter 9, I return to substance's use in explaining being and suggest that the picture of Aristotle's ontology I have developed allows us to understand why substance serves as an explanatory principle of being in general. I think that many things follow from the centrality of *activity* to *substance.* Not least of these is the fact that an ontology for which active being is a key to the nature of substantial being is an ontology of which a central and governing feature is the activity of being. It is that feature of Aristotle's ontology I hope this book makes more accessible.

My strategy throughout will be to try to present Aristotle's reasoning as clearly as I can. It is my hope that this essay could be read fruitfully by a wide range of philosophical readers, and not merely by specialists in ancient philosophy. Although some of my argument depends upon attention to Aristotle's Greek, I have translated everywhere, and I have transliterated the main technical terms, particularly the terms for substance, activity, potentiality, and motion.

I read Aristotle with a worshipful hermeneutical eye. This means several things. One is that I have made little effort to find fault with or to justify Aristotle in light of contemporary philosophical views. It is not so much that I think such effort borders on impudence—although I am struck by how often (to paraphrase Coleridge) we attempt to understand the mistakes of Aristotle when in fact we are simply mistaken about his

understanding.[6] It is rather that I think that given the stature of Aristotle as a thinker, it is a respectable enterprise simply to try to make clear what he is saying. Not the only enterprise, but this one. In eschewing criticism, I do not mean to eschew interpretation. To make clear what he is saying necessarily means to interpret and to say it in other language, and that is indeed what I have tried to do.

Similarly, I have confined references to other readers of Aristotle, even where alternative views are critical to the rhetoric of my argument, to notes. In doing this, I mean no discourtesy to these scholars or to the many I have not mentioned. It is simply that I do not propose here to take part in arguments and conversations with other scholars, though I obviously recognize that as an important and productive form of scholarship. It is just that I am doing something different. It is one interpretation that I mean to present—*this* reading of Aristotle—and if I am right, it will be convincing in the way interpretations are convincing: it will allow us to read Aristotle with greater understanding.

But we know that interpretation is always transformative; it can alter and extend the meaning of the original in ways we can only hope are in the spirit of the original and in harmony with it. Being worshipfully hermeneutical means I hope above all for that harmony and I struggle to achieve it. But it also means I am less troubled than others might be by the possibility of differences between some imagined ideal of historical authenticity and the views we now find philosophically powerful and enlightening and are willing to describe as those of Aristotle.

The mere act of writing a book such as this is a gesture of homage to a much earlier tradition, however transformed it may be in the ways true of a living tradition, but the substance of our readings always reveals our allegiances to one or another more recent tradition. Readings of Aristotle are always conversations that involve not only the voice of Aristotle but inescapably as well the voices of his many interpreters and perforce of our teachers, through whose words we were first introduced to the master and in whose words we regularly continue to think of him. For this reason, books about Aristotle often sound like fantasies of what Aristotle would have thought if only he had had the advantages of a Harvard education, or what he might have written after a grant from the Peripatetic Society of Thrace to spend a year or two at the University of Freiburg.

This book is of course no exception, although I hope to have avoided such extreme versions as I have just mentioned. I can only hope that in this essay the language of my reading of Aristotle and of his arguments reveals rather than obscures, and allows Aristotle to be heard again in a philosophical idiom that expresses the thought of his texts as well as we can hope to do.

As should be clear from my opening remarks, there are echoes in this work of several essays that presented aspects of this interpretation in earlier form. These essays include "Aristotle's First Predicament," in *Review of Metaphysics,* vol. 20, no. 3 (March 1967); "Aristotle's Definition of Motion," in *Phronesis,* vol. 14, no. 1 (1969); "Substance, Being and *Energeia:* The Argument of *Metaphysics Theta*," in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy,* Volume 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); "Divine Being and Divine Thinking in *Metaphysics* Lambda," in *Proceedings of The Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy,* Volume 3 (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1987); "Animals and Other Beings in Aristotle," in *Philosophical Problems in Aristotle's Biology,* edited by J. Lennox and A. Gotthelf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); "Aristotle's Prime Mover," in *Self-Motion from Aristotle to Newton,* edited by Mary Louise Gill and James Lennox (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); "Aristotle on the Activity of Being," in *Unity, Identity and Explanation in Aristotle's Metaphysics,* edited by T. Scaltsas, D. Charles, and M. L. Gill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); "*Metaphysics* L 9: Divine Thought," in *Aristotle's Metaphysics Lambda, Symposium Aristotelicum,* edited by Michael Frede and David Charles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and "Ontological Differences: *Being* and *Substance* in Book V of the *Metaphysics,*" in *Epoche: A Journal for the History of Philosophy,* vol. 11, no. 1 (Fall 2007).

My first coherent thoughts about Aristotle came in the course of reading with my teacher Celestine J. Sullivan, and the idea about the definition of motion came first in the middle of a conversation with my teacher and later colleague Rogers Albritton. I am grateful to these teachers, whose memories I cherish. The origins of this book in several decades of teaching and explaining Aristotle to students at Haverford College and elsewhere should be evident. I am grateful to those students, more than I can here name, for their thoughtful engagements with Aristotle's text and for

their questions and challenges, their various comments and contributions to my thinking about Aristotle over these years. I am grateful as well to my colleagues in philosophy at Haverford College, beginning with Paul Desjardins, who encouraged me in my habits of reading texts religiously and with devoted abandon, and continuing to Joel Yurdin, who has proved the best younger colleague a person could hope for. I am very grateful to friends and colleagues who have read various parts of this work in earlier states, in particular to Sarah Broadie, Danielle Macbeth, and Joel Yurdin. With different scholars, including among others David Bronstein, Miles Burnyeat, David Charles, Patricia Curd, Mary Louise Gill, Alan Gotthelf, James Lennox, Christopher Long, Jennifer Whiting, and Charlotte Witt, I have discussed issues of Aristotle's ontology both in print and in person and have always learned from the exchanges. I am thankful for the support of my friends Allen Bergson, Deirdre Bergson, Sara Ruddick, and William Ruddick and my family including Hannah, Isaac, Jacob, Joshua, and Tracy. The friendship and collegiality of Amelie Rorty was particularly important to me in the completion of this work, and I trust she knows how grateful I am for that fact. And always, to my wife and beloved companion, friend, and colleague Deborah Roberts I am deeply indebted, not just for her generous reminder of where Greek accents go and for her wealth of understanding of the literary culture out of which Aristotle wrote, but for her patience and kindness and unerring good sense. And of course I am grateful to the scores of readers of Aristotle, these and many more, with many of whom I have spoken over the years, from whom I have learned a great deal, but more importantly, who have helped create a community of scholars devoted to the careful and thoughtful and philosophically sensitive reading of our great teacher, *maestro de color che sanno*.[7]

Finally, for material support that has allowed me to devote myself to this work free of other responsibilities, I am grateful to John C. Whitehead and to the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

CHAPTER 1

Being and Substance

1. The Science of Being

This book is an exploration of Aristotle's ontology. When I speak of Aristotle's *ontology,* I mean to refer to the philosophical enterprise represented primarily in the collection of treatises we know as the *Metaphysics.* Aristotle has no term that is the exact equivalent of the English term *ontology,* or of the English term *metaphysics;* the enterprise carried out in the treatise we have come to call the *Metaphysics* is called by him *first philosophy.*[1] But it is clear that this enterprise is ontology, for he describes it as a science—that is, a body of theoretical discourse and investigation—concerned with the nature of being. By *Aristotle's ontology,* I mean simply his *theory of being.*[2]

The subject of being is for Aristotle, as it was for his predecessors, a subject of considerable significance and curiosity. But its scope is quite ordinary. In inquiring about being, Aristotle wants to know about that most ubiquitous feature of the universe that we mention when we remark upon facts such as these: the window is open or is closed, I am seated and am in this room, that animal is a horse and is gray, Abrams is human and is cultured, life is short, art is long, fate is fickle, and the evening is quiet over all the hilltops. It is the being involved in these and all similar

predicative facts—which means, of course, everything—whose structure and nature Aristotle endeavors to understand.

But the enterprise of ontology is not concerned with understanding specific instances of being (being this or being that), or even concerned with understanding specific types of being. It is concerned rather with understanding being as such, with understanding what Aristotle calls *ὄν ᾗ ὄν*: *being qua being.* Such an understanding, nevertheless, is best achieved, for reasons that Aristotle proposes, by particular attention to one mode of being: the mode of being that everyone calls substance—*ousia*—and which is said by Aristotle to be the explanatory principle of being in general.[3]

This fundamental mode of being, the being known as *substance* is in turn associated with two other features of being's structure. One is being's subject, that which underlies the predicative superstructure of being; the other is the being exhibited in a subject's being what it is (what, that is, rather than, say, where or what color or how large it is). These two features of being, the underlying subject and something's being what it is—call them substratum and essence—play a central role in the elaboration of the nature of being and of substance. When I mark an instance of being such as *that animal is a horse,* I am noting something *about a subject*—that animal—and (in this case) I mark *what that subject is:* a horse.

Explaining the web of associations that connect being with substance, and substance with substratum and essence, and sorting out properly the relation between substratum and essence, is one primary concern of Aristotle's *first philosophy.* We might think of it as the most theoretical face of Aristotelian ontology. Much of what I will be doing is trying to track Aristotle's thinking through this conceptual web.

In doing so, I hope to highlight two further features of Aristotle's ontology. One is the fact that for Aristotle ontology is only secondarily concerned with the question of what exists, or of what sorts of things there are. Its primary concern is with the nature of the being of things, and in particular, as I have just said, with the nature of that fundamental mode of being called *substance.* The full implications of this (implicit) insistence by Aristotle upon an "ontological distinction"—the fact in other words that ontology is concerned primarily not with entities but with the being of entities—will be seen as we look further into the details

of that ontology; in particular, it will be critical to our understanding of substance that we think of it as a mode of being and not simply as a category of entity characterized by such being.[4]

The second feature of Aristotle's ontology that I hope to highlight is the fact that the being centrally linked to substance is, on his view, best thought of as activity—*energeia.* In Book 9 of the *Metaphysics,* near the end of the long and intricate argument that constitutes the central books of that work, Aristotle completes a moment in his chain of reasoning with the thought that indeed substance (in a complex sense) is *energeia.* In the explication of that thought, I hope to show why *energeia,* and moreover *energeia* best construed as *activity,* is central to his developed understanding of substance and therefore, given the claims of the *Metaphysics,* to his understanding of being as such.

2. The Oneness of Being

I said that Aristotle thinks of ontology as concerned not with specific instances of being—not with being this or being that—but with being as such, with what he calls *ὄν ᾗ ὄν*: *being qua being.* He makes clear that this is the nature of his project in the opening lines of Book 4 of the *Metaphysics,* with which the central argument of that work may be thought to begin.[5]

> There is a science that considers being *qua* being, that is, what belongs to it by virtue of itself. This is the same as none of what are called the divisional sciences; for none of these others deal in general with being *qua* being, but they separate off some division of being and consider what happens to belong to it, as for example the mathematical sciences do. (*Metaphysics* 4.1, 1003a21–25)

A mathematical science such as plane geometry may be said to study being: plane figures, for instance, and what it is to be a plane figure. But the study of what it is to be a plane figure is not the study of being *as such,* any more than Abrams's interest in baseball would make her a physicist because it involves, among other things, thinking about objects in motion. You have to think about things in motion *insofar as they are*

in motion—qua moving, as Aristotle would say—in order to be studying kinetics. Similarly, you have to think about instances of being *insofar as they are instances of being* in order to be studying ontology.

This contrast between thinking of some A *qua* A, which is to think of *the A* in itself (or *per se*), and thinking of it *qua* B, which is to think of *the A* only accidentally (*per accidens,* as it was traditionally expressed)—thinking of it, but not thinking of it specifically as A—is a contrast that we will encounter again. In this context, it is used by Aristotle to make clear that his concern with *being* is a concern neither with some particular instance of being nor with some mysterious thing over and above these instances of being. It is a general concern with all such instances of being, as I mentioned earlier: the window's being open, my being seated, Lady Suffolk's being a horse and gray, Abrams's being human, the evening's being quiet *über allen Gipfeln*—a concern with instances of being generally—but *only insofar as they constitute instances of being.* It is an interest in being in general, but in being *as such.*

In the discussion of being later in the central books of the *Metaphysics,* specifically in Book 7, Aristotle makes two assertions that, because they express central features of his theory of being, might seem odd when considered alongside this characterization of ontology at the beginning of Book 4. One assertion is the claim of the opening lines of chapter 1 of Book 7: "being is said in many senses (*τὸ ὄν λέγεται πολλαχῶς*)" (*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028a10). The second is the claim made at the end of that chapter: "and indeed the question that has, both in ancient times and now, always been asked and always been the source of perplexity, the question, what is being (*τί τὸ ὄν*)? is just the question, what is substance (*τίς ἡ οὐσία*)?" (*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028b2–4).

The first of these assertions—that being is said in many senses—is an epitome of the theory introduced in the *Categories,* the theory that there is no simple generic uniformity to the being of things that can be said *to be.* Beings, according to this theory, are *homonymous;* that is, they are said *to be* in senses radically different from one another, senses whose difference is inscribed in the list of categories that we encounter in the work of that name. Aristotle opens that work, the *Categories,* with a description of things whose predicative structure is marked by such radical difference.

> Things are said to be homonymous for which only a name is common, whereas the account of being (*λόγος τῆς οὐσίας*) corresponding to the name differs, in the way for example that both a human and a drawing are animate (*ζῷον*). For these, only the name is common, whereas the account of being corresponding to the name differs; for if someone were to define what it is for each of these things to be animate (*τί ἐστιν αὐτῶν ἑκατέρῳ τὸ ζῴῳ εἶναι*), he would give in each case an account peculiar to that case. (*Categories* 1, 1a1–5)[6]

Two things are homonymous in this sense if they share a name but there is no predicate common to them signified by the name. Thus it may be true to say of each: *it is P,* but what it means to be P is different for each. The example that Aristotle gives is of a human and a drawing; each may be said to be *animate—ζῷον*—but they are not said to be animate in the same sense.

It may be the case, as is usually supposed, that in contrasting a man and a drawing, Aristotle has in mind the fact that the drawing of an animal has what the scholastics would term the *objective being* of an animal. This is the fact that the drawing is *of* an animal, that it *represents* an animal. It may be for this reason that it is said to be animate. I find this explanation implausible for two reasons. First, the term *ζῷον* is commonly used to describe pictures that are not of animals. Herodotus, for example, speaks of pictures—which he calls *ζῷα*—of the bridges on the Bosporus (Herodotus, *The Histories* 4.88). Second, the account that one would give to explain why the drawing of an animal was of an animal would be dependent upon what it is to be an animal, and Aristotle's point would be undermined. What seems more likely is that the term is used to capture a formal feature of pictures, the fact that they are so real as (almost) to seem alive. We similarly use the term *animated* in describing art and particularly in describing cartoon films. Think of Disney's *Pinocchio;* Pinocchio indeed is a double paradigm of metonymic animation, animated in several respects both before and after he is an animal. So the contrast is between what is said to be animate because it is a living animal and what is said to be animate because it is so lively as to seem alive, two cases in which what it means *to be animate* differ.

This example is contrasted by Aristotle with that of a human and an ox, which are said to be synonymous with respect to the same predicate:

> Things are said to be synonymous for which both a name is common, and the account of being corresponding to that name is the same, in the way for example that both a human and an ox are animate (*ζῷον*). For a human and an ox are in common termed animate, and the account of being is the same; for if someone were to give an account in each case, defining what it is for each of these things to be animate, he would give the same account. (*Categories* 1, 1a6–12)

Animate is a term that is not merely common to descriptions of a human and of an ox; it furthermore signifies a predicate that is univocally shared by them. Although being animate expresses itself differently in the case of a human and an ox such that *what it is to be a human* and *what it is to be an ox* are different, *what it is to be animate* is the same for both; each, in other words, is animate in the same sense.

Aristotle introduces this distinction in the beginning chapter of the *Categories* in anticipation of his discussion in chapter 4 of the different senses of *being* that are marked by the categories. The reason he does so is that a central claim of the *Categories* is that *being* is homonymous in the sense we have seen articulated in the opening chapter of that work. To say that *being* is homonymous in this sense is to say, for example, that the being of qualities and of quantities—being pale, for example, and being five feet tall—are not instances of being in the same sense. Categorically different predicates constitute categorically different modes of being; they are called *being*, one might alternatively say, in different senses. These different modes or senses of *being* are marked by the categories: substance, quantity, quality, relation, and so on. In general, therefore, the distinction anticipates the view that we have seen expressed in the opening lines of Book 7 of the *Metaphysics:* "being is said in many senses, . . . for it means on the one hand what something is—some determinate thing—and on the other of what quality or of what quantity or each of the other modes of being predicated in this way" (*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028a10–13).

The second assertion that I earlier marked Aristotle as making in the central books of the *Metaphysics*—the assertion that the question of be-

ing is the question of substance—suggests, in light of the homonymy of being, that the *Metaphysics* will concern itself with only one of the various senses of being, the sense represented by substance. It is now not difficult to understand the sense of oddness that I suggested might be occasioned by Aristotle's project in the *Metaphysics* as I have so far described it. It is a sense that can in fact be allayed, but it is one that is worth considering for the light that will be shed on Aristotle's understanding of first philosophy.

We saw that in Book 4 Aristotle promises to embark upon an investigation of being as such, "being *qua* being," as he puts it. But how can such a promise be fulfilled if being is an instance, perhaps the paradigm instance, of something radically ambiguous in its meaning, of something that Aristotle describes, as we have just seen, as "said in many senses"—*πολλαχῶς λεγόμενον*? If there is not, as the argument of the *Categories* suggests, one single and univocal sense of being, since each of the different categories represents a different sense in which a subject may be said to be one thing or another, then how can there be a single and univocal sense of being available to be the subject matter of a science that claims to be the science of being *as such*?[7]

Things seem odder if we think about the subsequent argument of the *Metaphysics*. For it is not *being as such* that Aristotle turns his attention to, but—just as the second assertion promises—a particular and specific mode of being, that of substance. Perhaps substance could be said to be the most basic mode of being, but it is still only one among several different modes. So although he promises a general ontology, in fact Aristotle offers only a special ontology, an ontology of substance.

Knowledgeable readers of the *Metaphysics* will recognize that the sense of oddness I described is founded on a misreading of the second assertion. For when Aristotle suggests that the question, what is being? is the question, what is substance? he does not mean that we should replace the one by the other—unanswerable by answerable, as it were—but that the one question is to be understood by means of understanding the other. It is a strategy that Aristotle means to announce, not a resignation. The strategy is based on an important theory elaborated by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* 4.2, and it is this theory that is above all implicit in his assertion at the end of chapter 1 of Book 7, the assertion that the question of being is the question of substance.

The theory concerns things that, although superficially homonymous with respect to a given predicate, nonetheless exhibit a unity of meaning because, as Aristotle puts it, they are all said in reference to a single sense or in reference to a single nature—*πρὸς ἕν* or *πρὸς μίαν φύσιν λεγόμενα*.[8] Their unity is achieved, in other words, by their analogous relation to one central sense in which some of them are said to exhibit the predicate. Recall that several things are said to be homonymous relative to some predicate A if each can be said to be A, but what it is for one of them to be A is different from what it is for another to be A. Aristotle now adds a modified form of homonymy; several things are said in reference to a single sense—*πρὸς ἓν λεγόμενα*—if they are homonymous in this way (the senses, in other words, in which each is said to be A are different from one another) but if there is some one sense of being A such that all things are said to be A in reference to this sense. This sense is then explanatorily prior to any other sense; what it is for anything else to be A must be understood in light of what it is for something to be A in this cardinal sense.

An example Aristotle gives in *Metaphysics* 4.2 of such predicational unity concerns things said to be healthy. Urine, exercise, and medicine may all be said to be healthy, but they are not all healthy in the same sense. What it is for urine to be healthy, for example, is quite different from what it is for exercise to be healthy, and so they are said to be healthy in different senses. But if we explicate why this is so, we will see that urine and exercise and medicine are not merely homonymously said to be healthy; they are not homonymous, for example, in the way that the east shore of the Ohio River and Wells Fargo may both be said to be *banks*. Urine is said to be healthy because it is indicative of an animal's health, that is, of an animal's being healthy; exercise, on the other hand, is said to be healthy because it contributes to and maintains an animal's health, and medicine because it produces or restores an animal's health. Thus although these three are healthy in different senses, these different senses are governed by a cardinal sense of being healthy, that in which an animal is said to be healthy, and they must therefore be understood in terms of that sense. They are therefore said to be healthy *πρὸς ἕν*—relative to an animal's health, that is, to a single sense of being healthy.

Although the example that Aristotle here gives is of something's being healthy (and subsequently of something's being an instance of medical

art), it is clear that his ultimate aim is to explicate the unity of being itself; it is to demonstrate that the categories of being are not *merely* homonymous in relation to one another, as might appear from the *Categories*. The claim that the categorically different modes of being are said in reference to one sense—*πρὸς ἓν λεγόμενα*—is the claim that all modes of being must be understood as being in terms of some cardinal sense of being that serves as a focal sense. That sense is the sense specified by *what it is for something to be a substance*.

The opening chapter of Book 7 of the *Metaphysics* makes clear that the theory of things said in reference to a single sense is intended by Aristotle to illuminate the nature of being itself. For after the opening we have noted in which he asserts the apparent homonymy of being, Aristotle continues: "while being is said in these various senses, it is clear that of these, the primary sense of being is what something is, which signifies substance" (*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028a13–15). Given the theory of *Metaphysics* 4.2, Aristotle must mean that although the senses of being are different, they nevertheless all involve reference to a single primary sense, the sense exemplified in substance. Aristotle offers this fact as a justification for his exclusive attention in these books to substance.[9] And this is what it means when at the end of the chapter we learn that "the question, what is being? is just the question, what is substance?" (*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028b2–4).

Although the oddness that I have imagined may thus be explained, it is, as I suggested, worthwhile to consider, for it reminds us of the full import of Aristotle's describing first philosophy as an inquiry into being qua being. Aristotle's theory of substance must be recognized as ancillary to his theory of being—his ousiology, as it were, in the service of his ontology. Indeed the reason that there is no oddness is just this fact, a fact that we may sometimes forget (as Aristotle himself may sometimes have forgotten) in the presence of his rather dazzling analysis of substance. When we are tempted to read the *Metaphysics* as reaching its climax and culminating in the discussion of substance in the central books, it may be salutary to recall that the question of the *Metaphysics* is the question, what is being?—*τί τὸ ὄν*, and indeed, what is the nature of being as such: *τὸ ὂν ᾗ ὄν*?

3. The Priority of Substance

So we are invited to look to substance for the answer to the question concerning being, and the nature of this invitation should settle the difficulty I imagined. But if that difficulty is to be settled by the unity that being enjoys, we will need to understand why the move to an examination of substance warrants that unity. Is it the case, as some readers of Aristotle have thought, that the reason an understanding of substance enables the understanding of being qua being is because being qua being is identical with substance or with some paradigmatic instance of substance?[10]

It should be clear why it is difficult to endorse this interpretation of Aristotle's argument. Describing the enterprise of first philosophy as the study of being qua being, Aristotle announces at the same time his intention to study being in general, insofar as it is being. If he were to identify substance with being qua being, it would be like his identifying substance with being in general, and that would then call into question the very feature of being with which the *Metaphysics* begins: the radical diversity of being in its several categorical modes.

More to the point, the identification is an impossible one. For there is no particular being that is designated by the phrase *being qua being* such that we could identify substance or any particular substance with it. To suppose that there might be is to misunderstand the grammar and the logic of the expression *being qua being.* Here is an analogy. Most mammals are land dwellers, but some are not; we might express this fact that the mode of animal being exhibited by mammals is not restricted to life on land by saying that the mammal qua mammal is not a land dweller. But we would not then have introduced a new animal, the mammal qua mammal, which inhabits the seas or heavens, nor would it be open to someone to speculate whether the mammal qua mammal that is not a land dweller is more likely to be dolphin or bat. There is no animal that is the mammal qua mammal, even though one may attend to the mammal qua mammal by attending to what it is for any given mammal to be a mammal, simply insofar as it is one.

Just so, when Aristotle says that we are to consider being qua being, he does not mean that we are to consider a particular instance or kind of

being designated by that phrase, substantial, divine, or otherwise, or a particular sense of being. He means that we are to consider the nature of being, but simply insofar as it is being: what it is for Abrams to be human, or to be in the Lyceum, or to be short, independent of the nature of the particular predicate involved and simply insofar as Abrams *is* any of these things. The object in *Abrams considers being qua being* is simply being; the additional *qua being* specifies the respect in which being is to be considered.

Successfully avoiding the identification of substance with being as such, however, may leave us uncertain as to what substance's role in explaining being is. If we claim that the study of substance is the key to a universal ontology, we need to know why this is the case. What is there about substance being that enables it to clarify being in general?

Perhaps the key is ontic. Perhaps substances are the only beings capable of separate and independent existence, existentially prior, as it were, to instances of the other categorical modes of being, all of which are dependent upon some substance for their existence. Quantities, qualities, positions, and so on are all the quantities, qualities, and positions *of some substance or other,* and their existence is possible only by virtue of the existence of substances. Could it be for this reason that the study of substance is the key to a universal ontology?

Note that such an observation, although it avoids the mistaken identification of substance and being, leaves Aristotle's strategy in the *Metaphysics* opaque. Why should the *ontic* priority of substance justify turning to it for an account of other modes of being, treating it, in other words, as enjoying a *conceptual* priority? Supposing without explanation that it does is like supposing that the history of the populations of Europe must be inscribed in the deeds of the great, capable of being read out of the adventures of kings and other nobles.

It seems to me unlikely that Aristotle has in mind such a substitutionary ontology, unlikely, in other words, that he thinks it sufficient that we understand the nature of substance and that no more is required for our being able to say that we understand being. The structure of the *Metaphysics* and its undivided attention to substance may tempt us in the direction of such a view, but the echo of the opening remarks of Books 4 and 7 is always in our ear. It is indeed to substance and its nature that we

must pay heed, knowing that substance is our key to understanding being. But we are left with the question why priority of substance enables the understanding of being, why it is that for Aristotle, "*καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸ πάλαι τε καὶ νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ ζητούμενον καὶ ἀεὶ ἀπορούμενον, τί τὸ ὄν, τοῦτό ἐστι τίς ἡ οὐσία*—and indeed the question that was asked long ago and now and is always asked and is always puzzled over: what is being? is just the question, what is substance?" (*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028b4–6).

There may be another sense in which this metaquestion might strike us as illegitimate, or at least premature. Imagine someone's objecting to Aristotle's inquiry into the nature of soul as providing a philosophical explanation of animal life on the grounds that it is an open question whether soul in fact is the principle of animal life: "maybe it's all chemistry, or maybe animals are only complex machines." That objection overlooks the semantic transparency of *soul.* Whatever turns out to be the appropriate scientific and philosophical story to tell about living things (a story that for Aristotle involves telling about their characteristic powers and activities), that story will be (at least a good part of) what makes up the analysis of soul. In this sense, the psychic could be virtually exhausted by chemical and mechanical principles. For *soul*—*ψυχή*—just means the principle by virtue of which living things (things that are besouled—*ἔμψυχα*) are alive: the form of animals. To object to Aristotle's inquiring into the nature of soul by way of explaining living things would be like our objecting to someone's inquiring into the nature of life to explain living things.[11]

In much the same way, and for much the same reason, the question of why substance may be thought to explain being has a simple answer: substance is the primary sense of being, and therefore, precisely as the argument of *Metaphysics* 4.2 is designed to show, understanding it will enable the understanding of being in general. We know this not because we have some understanding of the nature of substance that allows us to recognize it as primary, but because that is the meaning of the word that we translate as *substance:* substance—*ousia*—is to being rather as soul—*ψυχή*—is to being alive.[12] Whatever then an analysis of substance may reveal, it will be this that we will need to employ in understanding being. To ask at the outset of the discussion for more by way of understanding,

or by way of justification for appealing to the notion of substance, is to be a victim of the same misunderstanding as in the case we imagined with regard to the soul.

Once again, however, we have been reminded of the ancillary nature of the analysis of substance; ultimately, our discussion of ontology must lead back—whether in fact or merely virtually—to being. The primacy of substance within the categorical range of being only underlines this fact of substance's noblesse oblige; at the end of the day, we will want something by way of an answer to the question of how substance explains being.

4. The Senses of Substance

For now, we can note that it is primarily in the central books of the *Metaphysics*—above all Books 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 12—that the theory of substance and the explanation of how it illuminates being are developed. But it will be helpful for us to look first at the description of substance in Book 5 of the *Metaphysics.* In Book 5, Aristotle provides what is essentially a lexicon of the most important philosophical terms and their range of meaning. Although the chapter on substance is not obviously connected with the main thread of argument in the *Metaphysics,* it affords a view of the most rudimentary senses of substance, and it is, I will suggest, helpful in understanding how that argument goes. Here is Aristotle's account of substance in Book 5, chapter 8. (I have added numerals to the text in order to keep track of its parts.)

> We call substance, first, [1] the simple bodies, that is, earth and fire and water and the like, and in general bodies and the things composed of them, both animals and heavenly bodies, and their parts. All of these are called substance because they are not said of a subject, but all other things are said of them. Yet another sense refers to [2] whatever, being present in such things as are not said of a subject, is the cause of their being so (*αἴτιον τοῦ εἶναι*), like the soul in relation to an animal. Then there are [3] those constituent parts which by being present in such things define them and designate each of them as some determinate thing, and which, if they were taken away,

> the thing would be entirely taken away, like surface in relation to body, as some people say, or line to surface. And more generally, number seems to some to be of this sort: they say that if it were taken away, there would be nothing, and it defines all things. Then there is [4] something's being what it is (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*), the formula of which is a definition; this is also called the substance of each thing. It follows then that substance is said in two senses: [I] the ultimate subject, which is not said further of anything else, and [II] whatever, being some determinate thing, is also separable. And such is the shape and form of each thing. (*Metaphysics* 5.8, 1017b10–26)

This is a complex discussion. Aristotle proposes four different ways in which the term *substance* is used. The term is applied (1) to simple beings that are not said of subjects—that is, not predicated of them—but of which other things are said (as of a subject). It is also applied (2) to whatever is the cause of these things not being said of subjects (although other things are said of them as subjects) and (3) to what accounts for these things' being determinate things and defines them. Last, (4) something's being what it is, whose formula is a definition that represents things as what they are, is termed substance. He then suggests that there are basically two senses of the term: being a substance involves (I) being an ultimate subject and (II) being some determinate thing.

It is not difficult to understand the first and second of the four uses Aristotle proposes in relation to the two senses at the end of the chapter. *Substance* is first used (1) to designate things that are characterized by the first of these two senses: animals, for example, and other similar things that are the ultimate subjects of predication. These are the things that are said to be substances—the *ousiai*. The use marked in (2) applies to what we might think of as the substance—the *ousia*—of these substances; it refers, in other words, to that which makes substances in sense (1) substances.

Readers do not always understand the text this way. One commentator, for instance, paraphrases (2) with these words: "the internal cause of being in such things e.g. the soul."[13] This reading suggests two things about substance in this sense. (a) The causal dimension specified in (2) refers to substance as the cause of being in an unspecified sense, but

most likely in the sense of something's existence. (b) The soul is an example of substance in this sense thus understood. But neither of these is correct. (a) The causal sense is far more specific, and in any case refers to a predicative rather than an existential effect: Aristotle refers to the cause of that which is substance in the first sense being substance. That is, substance in this second sense is the explanatory cause of things that are ultimate subjects being ultimate subjects; I have indicated this fact by rendering *αἴτιον τοῦ εἶναι* by *the cause of their being so.* Thus (b) although the soul may indeed be an example of the sense of substance to which Aristotle is here drawing attention, it is not in that capacity that it is here introduced. It is introduced rather as part of an analogy, as we can see from the phrase "like the soul in relation to an animal—*οἷον ἡ ψυχὴ τῷ ζῴῳ*." Thus: as the soul is to an animal, namely, the cause of its being an animal, so is substance in this sense to those things that we have just marked out as substance in another sense: the cause, in other words, of their being substance.[14]

The third use, from its language, seems parallel with the second; substance is said of that which being present in things said in the first sense—"such things," as Aristotle puts it—defines them as some determinate thing. This suggests that there is another sense of substance left unsaid: that of *being a particular defined something,* of which the third use registers the causal principle, as the second does of the first. This sense emerges in the final sentences of the chapter as the second of the two senses with which Aristotle summarizes.

The fourth use continues and amplifies the sense of the third, explicitly referring to that whose formula constitutes the very definition by which things are defined: being a something, a *what.* If we recall the connection that we have already noted in the opening lines of *Metaphysics* 7.1 between substance, what something is, and being some determinate thing, this link between the third and fourth uses will not be surprising.

The second, third, and fourth of Aristotle's entries, therefore, refer us not to things that are said to be substance, but to the explanatory principle of this fact about them: the explanatory principle of things said to be substance by virtue in one case of their being subjects and in another of their having a determinate identity. Here is an analogy that might help us understand what Aristotle is here saying. Think of asking the

question, what do we mean by *weight?* and being offered two things to which the term *weight* applies: (a) the objects used as standards in weighing things—the ounce weight, the half-pound weight, the one-pound weight—and (b) that about them that constitutes them as weights—their weight. The relation in that answer reproduces the relation between uses (1) and (2), and between the missing use exhibited in sense II and uses (3) and (4): weights and their weight, and analogously, substances and their substance.

So there are two categorically different distinctions that Aristotle is drawing. On the one hand there is a distinction between those things that are substances and the internal constitution by virtue of which they are substances: substances and their substance. On the other hand, there is a distinction between two related criteria in terms of which we think of substances and their substance: as a subject of predication and as some determinate thing defined by an essence.

It will become important that we recognize the full and complex import of the latter criterion and of what it means to be some determinate thing—a *τόδε τι*. The simplest way to understand Aristotle is that he here wishes to identify substances with particulars, and that implicit in this identification is a connection between the two criteria I have identified; only particulars are fully qualified to serve as the ultimate subjects of predication.

But the situation is more complex than such a view would indicate. For particulars in general can be understood as subjects only in relation to what is identified by Aristotle as a fully substantial particular. The reason for this is that not everything—and I mean here not every *thing*—is unqualifiedly a determinate thing—a *τόδε τι*. Not every particular, that is to say, represents an instance of something's being what it is in the unqualified way in which Aristotle thinks that substances do.

This fact suggests that the important connection in Aristotle's thinking is between being a subject of predication and being an instance of a *what,* that is, exemplifying the mode of being that Aristotle refers to as *what something is—τὸ τί ἐστι*—and here marks by the connected though, as we will see, not identical concept of *something's being what it is—τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*.

So in this early discussion, substance may be seen as indicating on the one hand things that are determinate things and thus subjects and on the other hand the mode of being by which something is what it is, which is the being exemplified in such determinate things as are the ultimate subjects of predication, and which enables them to serve as subjects. Because, as we will see, substances are what they are, they are separable, that is, independent individuals, not subject to being overwhelmed by the attributes that may accidentally qualify them at any given moment, and therefore capable of being the ultimate subjects of predication.

5. The Inquiry into Substance

The discussion in the *Metaphysics* moves forward in its consideration of the nature of substance on these two parallel tracks. On the one hand, (A) our attention is always implicitly directed to the things that are called substances in the sense of constituting ultimate subjects: the things of which all else is predicated but that are themselves said of no independent subject. On the other hand, (B) we are asked to attend to the mode of being by virtue of which such things can constitute ultimate subjects.

Aristotle provides, at the beginning of the passage we have just read, an informal list of those things (A) that are the obvious candidates for ultimate subjects: "the simple bodies, that is, earth and fire and water and the like, and in general bodies and the things composed of them, both animals and heavenly bodies, and their parts" (*Metaphysics* 5.8, 1017b10–13). He offers a similar list in *Metaphysics* 7.2, beginning with a virtually identical inventory of those things that are agreed by most educated people to exhibit the determinate being identified as substance:

> Substance seems most obviously to belong to bodies; that is why we say that animals and plants and their parts are substances, and natural bodies such as fire and water and earth and everything of this sort, and whatever are parts of these or composed of them. (*Metaphysics* 7.2, 1028b8–12)

He then continues with things less obviously substantial that Pythagoreans, Platonists, and other philosophers might urge as instances of the being in question.

I put the matter this way—*as instances of the being in question*—to draw attention to Aristotle's locution in introducing the list: substance is said to belong—*ὑπάρχειν*—to certain kinds of things. Here the paradigmatic sense of the term *substance* refers to the kind of being characterizing those individuals that we call, now in a subordinate sense of the term, substances. We may think of this mode of being as simply the correlate of the extension of that class of objects called substances: hence the second usage of *Metaphysics* 5.8 according to which substance is that by virtue of which subjects are subjects. But it is also, as I will continue to urge, identified by Aristotle with that mode of being by virtue of which things are what they are, the mode of being that he consistently identifies with what he calls the *τί ἐστιν*—what something is.

Thus the parallel track (B) on which our inquiry into substance continues is attention to the mode of being that defines those things identified as primary subjects. Such attention is above all to the mode of being that is something's being what it is, for it is this being that enables a subject to be a subject. These parallel tracks on which the argument of the *Metaphysics* proceeds determine its dual concern, in the analysis of substance and being, with *subject* and *essence* and with their relationship.

These concerns are perhaps most subtly developed in Books 7 and 8 of the *Metaphysics*. It is here that we see the two different but related marks of the being we call substance elaborated in Aristotle's discussion. And it is here that we see them connected in turn with the technical notions of matter and form, notions that emerge, in the course of that discussion, as significant for his analysis of substance and of being in general.

I do not propose here to engage with the particulars of that discussion, about which a great deal has already been written, but merely to rehearse the outlines of its larger argument.[15] For my purpose is eventually to discover the role played by Book 9 in the final moves of that argument, and specifically the role played by the notion of *energeia*. Book 7 ends with an apparent impasse in the analysis that was to have revealed the nature of substance and in its light the nature of being in general.

That impasse concerns the question of the unity of substance, and how we can understand this unity against the background of the roles played by matter and form in this analysis. It is, as I will suggest, this question of the unity of substance to which Aristotle's analysis of activity is a response.

The issue of the unity of substance arises out of the original characterization of substance that we have observed in Book 5. In the early chapters of Book 7, Aristotle attempts to answer the question, what is substance? by reference to one or another of the obvious candidates that we have seen recommend themselves on the basis of early philosophical intuitions concerning substance. These attempts, however, all fail, and they fail for importantly related reasons.

6. Substratum and Essence

At the beginning of *Metaphysics* 7.3, Aristotle offers a list of senses in which we speak of substance, a list, in other words, that specifies what it is about the substances listed in chapter 2 that leads us to characterize them *as substances.* Chapter 2 offers an array of paradigmatic substances; chapter 3 opens Aristotle's reflection on the question of what might constitute their substance.

> We speak of substance, if not in more ways, at least in these four main ways; for [1] being what it is (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*), and [2] the universal (*τὸ καθόλου*) and [3] the class to which it belongs (*τὸ γένος*) are thought to be each thing's substance, and fourth [4] the subject of these things (*τούτων τὸ ὑποκείμενον*). (*Metaphysics* 7.3, 1028b33–1029a1)

We might explain the substance of a human being, for example, in terms of [1] being human, or in terms of [2] the universal *Human* (recall the platonists), or in terms of [3] the larger class to which humans belong, *animal,* for example, or in terms of [4] the subject or substratum—that which *is* any of these things, that to which they may be said to belong.

Aristotle immediately sets out to work considering these four modes of being that might lead us to identify something as a substance. In light

of his intuition that he straightaway states according to which "the primary subject is above all thought to be substance," Aristotle first considers the *fourth* of these modes of being (*Metaphysics* 7.3, 1029a1). He considers the consequences of the recognition, first registered in the lexical account of *Metaphysics* 5.8, that the being of substance is that of an underlying subject—a *ὑποκείμενον*, or underlier—that it is, as we learn from the *Categories,* not a mode of being predicated of or present in a subject, but the subject itself of which secondary modes of being are predicated and *in which* instances of such being are present.

Metaphysics 7.3 records the attempt to build upon this fact—the fact that substances are the basic subjects or the logical substrata of which all other modes of nonsubstantial being are predicated—an account of substance as underlying subject—*ὑποκείμενον*. But the sense of subject developed is that of substratum as pure receptivity—receptivity in that it is the site of determination by some predicate or other, pure in that it is marked by no identifying characteristics. But this attempt fails, and it is not difficult to see why.

Suppose the claim is that substance is in itself that which is *ὑποκείμενον*, underlying subject. And suppose we want to say something more about what such underlying subject is, something about the nature of substance thus understood. Unfortunately, any predicate that we might offer as a characteristic of substance will generate the response that substance must be the *subject* of that predicate—not identical with it, but the logical substrate that is qualified by it. It follows, by such reasoning, that substance itself must be propertyless.

If, then, we infer from the fact that substance plays the role of ultimate subject of predication the belief that it is what is, as it were, "left over" when we take away all predicates, substance can be characterized by no particular nature. We will then be left, as characteristic of substance, only with matter, in the sense in which matter is "that which in itself is said to be neither any kind nor any quantity nor any other of the modes by which being is determined" (*Metaphysics* 7.3, 1029a20–21).

This is a view that we may recognize; in different contexts and often for different purposes, later philosophers were led to roughly analogous views. Here, for instance, is Locke:

> So that if any one will examine himself concerning his notion of pure substance in general, he will find he has no other idea of it at all, but only a supposition of he knows not what *support* of such qualities which are capable of producing simple ideas in us; which qualities are commonly called accidents. (*Essay on the Human Understanding,* Book 2, chapter 23, "Of Our Complex Ideas of Substances")

But it is a view, as I have suggested, roundly repudiated by Aristotle.[16] For this view, Aristotle says, is impossible, "since being separable, that is, some determinate thing, is thought above all to characterize substance (*καὶ γαρ τὸ χωριστὸν καὶ τὸ τόδε τι ὑπάρχειν δοκεῖ μάλιστα τῇ οὐσίᾳ*)" (*Metaphysics* 7.3, 1029a27–28).

In a sense, this repudiation is dialectical and temporary, for the refusal to accept an account of substance as substratum or indeed as matter is linked to an immature understanding of substratum and matter, and this understanding is qualified before the end of Book 9. But it is nevertheless an important repudiation, for it marks a core element in Aristotle's account of substance and of being throughout the *Metaphysics,* an element already apparent in the *Categories:* determinate being is the condition of the openness to further determination, an openness that enables something to serve as logical or ontic subject. Substance is, as Aristotle puts the point time and again in his discussion, both a *this* and a *what;* and here the important point is that its *being a this* is what enables it to serve as subject, and its *being a what* is a condition of the possibility of its *being a this.* Any account of substance, therefore, that attends merely to (a) the fact that the being of substance is that of subject without attending to (b) the essential determinacy of substance that is a condition of that fact—any such account will be deficient.

If we think of Aristotle's argument in chapter 3 in these terms—if we realize that a proper theory of substance as substratum must account for the necessity of substances' being what they are and thus recognize that essence is a condition of a substance's capacity to serve as subject—the direction of the argument in the next chapters of Book 7 will seem natural to us. For in chapter 4 Aristotle turns to a discussion of what we saw

in *Metaphysics* 5.8 identified as the fourth use of *substance:* substance as something's being what it is—*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*. This move to a discussion of essence is not merely a move to another item on a list—a list of those aspects of substances that might explain their being substances—as though such a list were merely an arbitrary collection of possible candidates that might do the job. It is the natural step in an argument whose dialectical progression leads from being a *this* to being a *what,* that is, from subject to essence (or as we might say in inkhorn style, from haecceity to quiddity).

But the attempt in chapters 4 through 6 to give an account of substance strictly in terms of quiddity, important as it may be in revealing features of essence and its relation to other modes of being, proves unsatisfactory precisely because of this dialectical relationship, precisely because of its failure to account sufficiently for the individuality of substance. The relation that develops in these chapters between what may be thought of as the dialectical poles of Aristotle's argument—between substance as substratum and substance as essence—has, as I suggested, another face in Aristotle's ontology. It is more generally expressed in the relation between subject and predicate in the structure of being: the relation, in other words, between something that is a being and the being that that something is. This relationship, central to Aristotle's surface theory of predicational or "combinatorial" being, is in turn reflected in a more focused and thematized fashion in the relationship, pervasive in his technical expression, between *matter* and *form.*

In order to recognize that reflection correctly, however, we will need to think of matter and form in terms broader than we might be used to. We will need to avoid thinking of them solely in terms of change and becoming, that is, in terms of motion. For although there is a straightforward and readily understandable account to give of matter and form if we attend to contexts of motion or change, the more revealing account for our purposes concerns the role of matter and form in the analysis of being.

7. Matter and Form as Principles of Change and of Being

The account of matter and form in relation to motion or change is roughly this: the matter of something—say, of a threshold—is what it is made out of or comes to be out of, the material ex quo of the threshold.

The form of something, on the other hand, is the principle by virtue of which (through the agency of an efficient cause) the material that the thing is made out of, the wood, for example, out of which the threshold was formed, comes to be or is made into specifically that thing, in this instance into a threshold. This is the account Aristotle likes to give in the *Physics* (which is, after all, about nature as matrix and principle of motion or change) and in the early introductions of matter and form in the dialectical argument of the *Metaphysics*.[17]

But the governing concern of the *Metaphysics* is not with contexts of change. It is with the logically prior context of being, and for this concern, a somewhat different account is appropriate. The matter of something—again, say, of a threshold—is what the thing is made up of; it is what is the threshold materially, or as we might say in order to bring out continuity with the previous account, that of which the threshold consists. The form, on the other hand, is the principle by virtue of which that which is something in this material sense—the wood, say, of a threshold—is specifically that thing: the principle by virtue of which the threshold's matter makes up a threshold. These are the meanings that we see, for example, in the discussion of the varieties of form in *Metaphysics* 8.2. The matter of a threshold, to continue the example, is the wooden beam that is, as we might put it, at work being the threshold, while its form, that by virtue of which it is a threshold rather than a lintel or a rafter or anything else, is the functional position in the house in which the wooden beam has been placed. Similarly, the matter of dinner is the food that is eaten at that meal; its form, on the other hand, that by virtue of which that food is dinner rather than breakfast, is the time at which it is eaten (*Metaphysics* 8.2, 1042b11–1043a1).

Here, then, are two related but different concepts of matter and of form in Aristotle's ontology. The difference between them depends upon whether we take *becoming* or *being* as our primary context. Matter may, on the one hand, be thought of as an entity's material ex quo, as the separate from-which of change and generation, and on the other, as the proximate underlying subject of its being, that of which it consists. Notice that these are often (although not always) only notionally distinct, that is, only different descriptions of the same thing. It is the same wooden beam out of which a threshold is made and which is as a result at

work making up a threshold. In this respect *matter* and *form* alike refer to things taken a certain way. Both terms designate ways of thinking about the entities of the world relative to an explanatory or descriptive or analytical context. Like substance, therefore, matter and form are principles of being and not categories of thing; the world cannot be divided up, as it were, into instances of matter and instances of form.

To say that a wooden beam is matter can therefore be misleading. For when we consider the wooden beam as matter, it is in a sense the threshold that is being considered, either (a) materially, that is, in terms of what it is made of, or (b) as the end term in a process of change of which the wooden beam, as material in another sense, is the first term. In a manner of speaking, then, a wooden beam is never matter; for when it is still a wooden beam, it is not yet matter, and when it is matter, it is no longer a wooden beam, but a threshold. We might put it this way: in Aristotle's view, in keeping with his assertion that a box is not wood but wooden, a threshold is not a wooden beam, but is, so to speak, wooden beamy.[18] And strictly speaking, there is no determinate being that is matter—in other words, no matter that is anything: "By matter I mean that which is in itself neither this nor so much nor said in any of the other categories by which being is determined" (*Metaphysics* 7.3, 1029a19–20).

Matter is a principle of indeterminacy relative to some being. When we speak, therefore, of wooden beams or of bronze or of bricks and stones as matter, we are speaking of things that may be thought of in terms of such indeterminacy relative to other determinate things; we are speaking of things that can serve as matter, but that are not in themselves matter. This is not to deny the appropriateness of the simple assertion that bronze, for example, is the matter of a statue. It is only to stress the fact that in so being considered, bronze loses the determinate being it has qua bronze, and comes to be thought of as indeterminate relative to another being, comes to be thought of, that is, as the matter of a statue. The determination that it had as bronze becomes part of the determination of the statue. It is a brazen statue, just as the box made of wood is a wooden box.

Corresponding to these distinct ways of thinking of matter, there are distinct ways in which we may think of form. Form may be thought of, on the one hand, as that which explains the coming to be or production of a being out of some matter. But it may, on the other hand, be understood as

a determining principle of being: the principle, in other words, that determines why some matter constitutes this rather than that being.

It is when we think of the relation between matter and form in the context of being that we are able, as I suggested, to recognize its affinity to the relation between subject and predicate or substratum and being—the relation, that is, between something that is a being and the being that that something is. For in this sense the distinction between matter and form parallels the distinction between the thing that is, in the instance we considered a moment ago, a threshold, and its being, again in this instance, its lying in such and such a position. For the thing lying in such a position is an element in its being a threshold: something "is a threshold because it lies in such and such a position, and its being means lying in that position" (*Metaphysics* 8.2, 1042b26–27).

The science of thresholds, of course, is not a science that studies—even accidentally—substances. For thresholds are importantly *not* substances; being a threshold, that is, is not an instance of the kind of being Aristotle calls substance.[19] Nor are cloaks and brass spheres substances. Aristotle turns to these things in the *Metaphysics* not as examples of substance, but because they are beings in which it is easier to abstract matter and form and examine them as separate principles. This means that he turns to them precisely because they are not instances of substance, not instances of that mode of being for which, as we will see presently, matter and form are one and the same thing. Their scrutiny, however, makes possible the articulation of important truths (a) about substance and (b) about the relation of subjects to their predicational being in terms of matter and form.

In its concern with the relation between matter and form in the analysis of substance, Book 7 figures the larger concern of the *Metaphysics,* a concern, on the one hand, with understanding the relation between a subject and its being and, on the other, with situating the concept of substance with respect to these two poles. In Book 7, I have suggested, Aristotle leads us carefully through both the arguments that recommend an account of the being of substance in terms of subject or substratum and those that recommend an account in terms of the essential being of a subject. But as Book 7 progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that these accounts, which are parallel to accounts of substance as matter and form,

must surrender to the more obvious fact that substance must involve a product of these two principles. It cannot be fully explained by either, and each is somehow necessary to the project of explanation. It seems that substance must therefore be somehow understood as a combination of matter and form.[20]

8. Why Substance Is Not a Combination of Matter and Form

Here our account of Aristotle's theory might end with a recognition of matter and form as coordinate principles in the explanation of substance, substance best envisioned as a combination of matter and form. And here indeed accounts often do end, with descriptions of Aristotle's *hylomorphism* according to which substance *consists of matter and form*.[21] What makes such descriptions so misleading is their failure to heed Aristotle's insistence, made clear in the elegant argument of *Metaphysics* 7.17, that matter and form cannot be *elements* in the being of substance. For form is precisely something other than a being's elements, something that is the source of the fact that those elements constitute just that being. If then we think of form as an element in the being of substance, Aristotle argues in that final chapter of Book 7, we will need yet a further formal principle to explain why these elements constitute that being. A simple analogy makes Aristotle's point:

> A syllable is not merely its elements, the vowel and the consonant, but something else as well, and flesh is not merely fire and earth or the hot and the cold, but something else as well; but if this something else must be an element—the same argument will apply, for flesh will consist of this and fire and earth and yet another thing, and this will go on to infinity. (*Metaphysics* 7.17, 1041b16–22)

The argument that this analogy reveals (clearly a scion of the better-known Third Man argument of Plato's *Parmenides*) shows that the sense in which substance requires both matter and form in its explanation cannot be one that makes matter one element and form another, or one that makes the product of matter and form a joining of elements.[22]

We need therefore to ask in what sense, if any, substance can be said to be a combination. More critically, we need to ask how it could be a combination and still be primary being; for if something is a combination of elements, then those elements or the principle of their unity or both will be primary. We need, in other words, to inquire not simply into the nature of substance's unity, but into its very possibility. These are the questions to which the *Metaphysics* turns at the end of Book 7, and they are the questions that inform the argument of the next two books. In one sense they are technical questions in the elaboration of a theory of substance, but in another they may be considered to lie at the very center of Aristotle's inquiry into substance and being.

9. Theories of Being

At the heart of that inquiry is the project of rescuing substance from collapsing into either of the poles explored dialectically in Book 7, and these poles, which I have been describing as developments of our intuitions concerning substance, are also central characters in versions of the major competing theory of being that Aristotle addresses. The project therefore concerns not merely the nature of substance, but the nature of being in general. According to this competing theory, which we might call platonist, things in the world of nature are instances of a relation between a subject and its being.[23] No such thing, and a fortiori no such subject, is therefore itself an instance of being. Properly speaking, being belongs only to the transcendent what, to the Form, to which such a thing stands in relation, and the "being" of that thing—its being that *what,* so to speak—is only an instance of such a relation, a relation that we may recognize in the important but problematic platonic concept of participation—*μέθεξις*.[24]

We may imagine answering such a theory in several ways. We might insist that being belongs instead most properly to subjects, because it is a subject that is (whatever it is). This is essentially the strategy of atomists and other materialists, and it is the strategy that Aristotle considers in the dialectical moment in *Metaphysics* 7.3. Aristotle's more typical response to this theory, however, and his earliest response—above all in

the treatise on the categories, but wherever is found the early doctrine of the categories as modes of predicative being—is characteristically generous and variegated. Being is granted to a broad variety of candidates, but in different modes. Certain things are instances of substance being in a primary sense, while what they are also qualifies as substance, though in a secondary sense.[25] Instances of other modes of being borrow their being, as it were, from the being of these substances. But most generally, it is the relation among these that is being, the predicative being signaled by our predication of *τὶ κατὰ τινός*: our saying "this is that."

In the more mature ontological project of the *Metaphysics,* however, Aristotle develops, beyond the gentle criticism of platonism in the *Categories,* a more radical critique of the platonist model of "relational being." He accepts a relational theory as an account of the nature of accidental being—being *κατὰ συμβεβηκός*—one thing accidentally happening *(accidens)* to be another. For here there is a relational unity (the nature of which we will later explore) between (1) an independent subject and (2) a predicative being dependent upon that subject but something it merely happens to be. The other categories provide the types of predicative being while substance signifies the subject.

But Aristotle reveals this model as misleading with respect to the being of substance itself. For in the being identified as substance there is no relation of some predicative being to a subject that can be defined and identified independently of that being. Such a relation is precisely the mark of accidental being. It is a human who is laughing or who is pale or who has just left the outskirts of Anaheim, and in each of these cases some being is said of that individual human as of a subject. But the being that constitutes that subject—that human—as what it is is not in turn an instance of something (being human) said of an independently identifiable subject—said *καθ' ὑποκειμένου*. For what is said to be human is nothing other than the human who is being human, and it is that human being human that is the primary being, the substance, described as some particular human—*ὁ τὶς ἄνθρωπος*, that is, some particular instance (though of course no instance in particular) of being human.

This fact, that substance being is not predicated of an independent subject, was already recognized in the *Categories,* but it was there confined to so-called primary substances: "substance in the strictest, pri-

mary, and most appropriate sense of the word is that which is neither said of some subject nor present in some subject" (*Categories* 5, 2a11–15).

What the *Metaphysics* accomplishes is a theory that recognizes the applicability of this fact to what the *Categories* thinks of as *secondary* substance. We might think of this theory as the realization of how important it is that even in the *Categories* primary substances are introduced by their being: the examples Aristotle gives are of particular instances of being—this particular human, for example—*ὁ τὶς ἄνθρωπος*—and this particular horse—*ὁ τὶς ἵππος*, and not just some particular: Raskin, say, or Lady Suffolk. What some particular human being like Raskin is, after all, is some particular human being, and it is just that that is human. It is important to see this point. What is introduced is not some particular kind of thing—human being or horse—but an instance of that kind—a particular human being or a particular horse. But no particular instance is introduced—not Raskin, not Lady Suffolk; the introduction of Raskin or Lady Suffolk would blunt the force of the fact that it is qua human being that a substance like Raskin or Socrates is a substance, and qua horse that Lady Suffolk is. We are accustomed to thinking of Socrates as a paradigm instance of substance. That may be true, but it is not the way Aristotle characteristically thinks of this fact. For it is not qua being Socrates that the human being named Socrates is an instance of substance, but qua being a particular instance of human being.

The reason that substance is said by Aristotle not to be predicable of a subject is thus not the reason often given. It is not because one cannot form the proposition *This is a Socrates;* it is rather because of the fact that in the proposition *Socrates is a human being, human being* is not said of something as of an independent subject. There is not something that is what it is independently of being that which human being is predicated of that is said to be human. It is just *a human being* (Socrates, as it happens) who is said to be human.

Here is how to phrase this fact in terms of matter and form. The wooden beam that is a threshold is something that can be removed from its position, and it is that very wooden beam which, in the proper position, will be a threshold. This does not allow us to say that a wooden beam is what a threshold is. A threshold is *made out of* a wooden beam; it is, as we said earlier, *wooden beamy,* in the sense in which the beam may be said to be

wooden. But in this case, that which is a threshold has a being independent of its being a threshold. The matter of the threshold is something other than a threshold, and it is this something else that constitutes the matter relative to the positional form that constitutes it as a threshold.

With humans, it is different; there is nothing—that is, there is no independent thing—that is the matter of a human, for the flesh and bones of a human are themselves human.[26] A substance, we might say, is form all the way down. Alternatively we might also say that it is above all matter. For to see the sense in which matter is that which is the being that constitutes the thing it is is to see the sense in which Abrams is the matter of the walker, for it is Abrams who is walking.[27]

More accurately, we need to say that if substance is being in which what it is is what it is by virtue of itself—in other words, if it is *καθ'αὐτὸ* or per se being—there can be in it no separation of matter and form, as there is between a wooden beam and its position. There can, in other words, be no separation between that which is the substance and that which the substance is.

10. Substance as Being by Virtue of Itself

Substance is thus the primary mode of being, being in which the being of a subject does not merely happen accidentally to belong to it, but does so by virtue of what the subject itself is: *καθ'αὑτό*, as Aristotle puts it—per se or by virtue of itself, and not *κατὰ συμβεβηκός*—per accidens or accidentally. If we wish to understand properly this distinction between being in which a subject is what it is by virtue of itself and being in which a subject is what it is accidentally, we need to look back at the chapter in Aristotle's philosophical lexicon that precedes the discussion of substance we have just read; there, as part of a discussion of various senses of being, Aristotle attends to the distinction we have just invoked:

> Something is said to be, on the one hand, by virtue of what is accidental (*κατὰ συμβεβηκός*) and, on the other, by virtue of itself (*καθ'αὑτό*). By virtue of what is accidental, for example, we say that someone who is just is educated, or that some human is educated, or that someone educated is a human, just as we say that someone edu-

> cated builds because being educated is an accidental characteristic of a builder, or being a builder of someone educated. For here "this is such-and-such" means "such-and-such is an accidental characteristic of this." That's how it is in the cases we have mentioned. When we say that some human is educated and someone educated is a human, or that someone pale is educated or someone educated pale, it is either because both are accidental characteristics of the same being or because one is the accidental characteristic of some being, while we say that someone educated is a human because it is that to which the educated accidentally belongs. . . . Things said to be by virtue of themselves, on the other hand (*καθ'αὑτὰ δὲ εἶναι λέγεται*), are just those indicated by the categories of predicates; for being has just as many senses as there are these categories. Since among things predicated, some signify what a subject is, others its quality, others quantity, others relations, others acting or being acted upon, others place, others time, being signifies what corresponds to each of these. (*Metaphysics* 5.7, 1017a8–27)

The distinction that Aristotle here draws between examples of being in which a subject is what it is by virtue of itself and examples in which a subject is what it is accidentally is an instance of a much more general distinction that he employs in various contexts. We have already seen, for example, a definition of first philosophy as a study of what belongs to being by virtue of itself, and not merely accidentally. Elsewhere in the philosophical lexicon, Aristotle describes some of the senses in which we speak of something as *by virtue of itself—καθ'αὑτό*. Of particular interest is Aristotle's assertion there that one of the meanings is exemplified in our saying that "a surface is white by virtue of itself" (*Metaphysics* 5.18, 1022a31). The sense is not hard to make out. We can say that a house is white by virtue of the fact that its surface is white. But there is nothing such that by virtue of its being white the surface is white in the same way that a house is white by virtue of its surface being white. Its surface, we may want to say, is white merely by virtue of itself; it is white per se.

But even in those cases in which it is correct to say that a surface is white, it is still the case that "being a surface is not the same as being white" (*Metaphysics* 7.4, 1029b18). And this fact should lead us to recognize that it is

somewhat of an overstatement (or perhaps from the point of view of hardcore ontology an understatement) to say that a surface is white by virtue of itself; for a surface's being white is dependent upon its color's being white. So perhaps we ought to say this: there is nothing by virtue of which the surface of a house is white, in the same way that a house is white by virtue of its surface's being white, except the color of its surface.

In a sense, therefore, it is a house's color that is white by virtue of itself (assuming, of course, that the house is white). The house, on the other hand, is white only by virtue of the fact that its color is (by virtue of itself) white; the house is white, in other words, by virtue of its having a certain color (or we may say a colored surface) that is white. A house's being white is thus the result of the co-incidence of two beings: something's being a house, and something's being white. And if (for reasons that will become clear) we consider not a house but a substance such as a horse, the same thing will be true: a horse's being gray is the result of the co-incidence of two beings: something's being a horse, and something's being gray.

As we will see, these distinctions are, together with the distinction between substance and the other categories, of central import to the argument of the *Metaphysics,* for in that work, Aristotle is attending to distinctions among (at least) these three kinds of being:

- accidental being—being *κατὰ συμβεβηκός*—in which a subject is what it is said to be only accidentally: *a horse's being gray,* for example;
- per se being, or being by virtue of itself—what Aristotle calls being *καθ'αύτό*—in categories other than substance, in which a subject is what it is by virtue of itself, but is not a substance: *the color gray's being gray,* for example; and
- the primary mode of per se being, or of being by virtue of itself, substance—*ousia: a horse's being a horse,* for example.

Predicates in the second category—being gray, for instance—are sometimes referred to as accidental, since the belonging of such predicates to a subject other than itself is what constitutes the being of the first

category—a horse's being gray, for instance. Discussions of the *Metaphysics* then make it sound as though the distinction between per se being and accidental being were primarily concerned with accidental being in this secondary sense and as though the distinction between being in the second category and being in the third category—between *gray's being gray* and *a horse's being a horse*—were the central distinction in the argument of the *Metaphysics.*

That distinction is indeed important, as it continues the mode of ontological classification from the *Categories* and is at the heart of the theory we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the theory of things said in reference to one sense, a theory critical to the understanding of being (and of essence as well).[28] But it is not Aristotle's only and perhaps not even his primary distinction. Of equal importance to his ontology is the distinction between, on the one hand, being in the first category—*a horse's being gray*—and, on the other hand, being in the second or third category—*being a horse* or *being gray,* said of the animal or of the color. Here the distinction is that between in itself being and accidental being, where accidental being is taken in the original sense of category 1, *a horse's being gray,* for example, or *a man's being weary.* This is the distinction drawn in *Metaphysics* 5.7, 1017a8–30, and it is the distinction that Aristotle is working to articulate and to save with the help of substance.

An easy ontology would be one in which being by virtue of itself were identified both with substance and with being in the other categories, provided only that we restrict the being in question to predicate being, that is, to the being that some subject is, and not to the predicative whole including both subject and predicate. Being gray and being in the Lyceum are, as the discussion in *Metaphysics* 5.7 makes clear, thus instances of being by virtue of itself.

Of course such senses of *being* are notional, because there is no being without a subject. But the purity of such abstracted being affords us considerable power to observe the nature of that being. Thinking of being gray in itself free of the conceptual noise that a horse's being gray brings in its wake makes it possible to attend more clearly to and to see more clearly the color that is an accidental characteristic of the horse. Thus the abstractive purity of such notions—gray in and of itself or beautiful in and of itself rather than the gray horse or the beautiful boy—makes

them strikingly attractive. (Witness of course Plato, about whom it should be clear we have been talking.)

It remains true that these are merely notional understandings of being, understandings that purchase purity only through an ontic cleansing and that are therefore at a deeper level incomplete because of their lack of a subject—incomplete and therefore, in a literal sense, imperfect. It should furthermore be clear that they are instances of being by virtue of itself only derivatively so, because they are fundamentally dependent for their being on the being of substance, which means not only on the existence of substance but also on substance's mode of being. So the primary being by virtue of itself must remain, for example, being human.

Such a theory, having made these important qualifications, may be more textured than a platonist ontology that does not thus distinguish between one and another mode of being by virtue of itself, but considers merely the being of Form (often referred to, revealingly, as being "itself by virtue of itself—*αὐτὸ καθ'αὑτό*"). But it nevertheless remains in all important respects a platonist theory in the sense outlined above. Being in its paradigmatic sense is a being to which a subject stands in some relation.

What Aristotle is concerned to articulate is a theory that does not rely on ontic cleansing, a theory in which the being by virtue of itself that characterizes substance includes the subject as well. The substance that is a human being is not merely the Form of being human by which an individual subject is characterized, but that individual subject's being human. Such a being seems intractably to be an instance of accidental being, and so it has always seemed to platonists. For it is a synthesis of a subject and its being, and can be shown to be a case of being by virtue of itself only if these two can be shown to be in some important respect one and the same thing.

If we are to sustain the notion that substance is per se being—being by virtue of itself—in this strong sense, and consequently sustain the analysis that avoids the relational pitfalls of platonism, we will need to be able to give a proper account of how in substance, matter and form, subject and being, are one. This becomes the ruling problem of the central books of the *Metaphysics,* the problem of explaining (the very possibility of) the unity of substance.

We have noted briefly that the progression of Book 7 of the *Metaphysics* ends in perplexity precisely concerning this issue. Many influential readings have thought therefore that the book thus ends aporetically, and that there is little more to be said than to recognize the dialectic that leads to this perplexity.[29] This is an attractive view, not least of all by virtue of its ability to see how like the *Metaphysics* is to a Platonic dialogue in the structure of its argumentation.

But the sense in which it is dialectical, and indeed the sense in which it is aporetic, is subtler than can be realized from Book 7 alone. At the end of that book, the argument, far from being finished, is barely begun. Book 7 is preparatory to Books 8 and 9, and finally indeed to Book 12, and there is an argument about substance much larger than is encompassed merely in the chapters, however philosophically rich and complex they may be, of Book 7. We will see as we proceed in uncovering the shape of this argument that even in its later forms it remains importantly dialectic and indeed aporetic. But to see correctly the argument, we need to look further into its progression.

I want to end this chapter with the closing remarks of Book 8. Aristotle has been considering a question of unity not identical with but clearly an analogue of the problem at the end of Book 7 that we talked about a moment ago. And then he says:

> Clearly then, if we go on defining and speaking in this manner, it will be possible neither to get an answer nor to solve our perplexity; but if, as we say, there is on the one hand matter and on the other form, and one has to do with ability and the other with activity (*τὸ μὲν ὕλη τὸ δὲ μορφή, καὶ τὸ μὲν δυνάμει τὸ δὲ ἐνεργείᾳ*), what we are after will no longer be perplexing. (*Metaphysics* 8.6, 1045a23–26)

At the end of the chapter, Aristotle locates more generally the trouble of past thinkers in the fact that they search for a concept that will unify the principles of *dunamis* and *entelechy,* principles that have come to be linked with matter and form and that are thought to be distinct. But we know how to think differently. "Proximate matter and form, as we have said, are one and the same thing, on the one hand *dunamis,* on the other,

energeia (*ταὐτὸ καὶ ἕν, δυνάμει, τὸ δὲ ἐνεργείᾳ*)" (*Metaphysics* 8.6, 1045b19).

To understand Aristotle's remarks, we will need to think more about one of the central topics of this book, his understanding of *energeia*. It is to this topic—Aristotle's theory of activity—that I now want to turn.

CHAPTER 2

Motion and Activity

In Book 9 of the *Metaphysics* (9.6, 1048b18–34), Aristotle distinguishes between two kinds of *energeia*. One of these he calls *kinesis*—motion or change—and the other he calls simply *energeia,* as though to signify that it is *energeia* proper—activity in the strictest sense. Earlier in the same book, he has distinguished between two kinds of *dunamis,* that is, two kinds of ability, or as it has more traditionally been called, *potentiality.* The two distinctions seem related in a straightforward manner: one kind of ability is related to and defined in terms of *kinesis*, or motion, the other related to and defined in terms of *energeia* proper, or activity.[1]

1. Two Modes of Ability

Aristotle indicates early in *Metaphysics* 9 that potentiality or ability in the more immediately obvious and accessible sense—he describes it as what is said *μάλιστα κυρίως*, most literally or ordinarily (*Metaphysics* 9.1, 1045b36)—is the ability related to *motion,* just as he describes motion itself as the most obvious and accessible mode of activity (*Metaphysics* 9.3, 1047a30–32; 9.1, 1045b35–1046a1; 2.1, 996a11–12). But these are not the primary objects of his attention in Book 9; it is activity and the ability related to activity in which Aristotle is primarily interested, and

he takes great care to distinguish these from motion and its associated ability. It is, he claims, the mode of ability related to activity that is the truly "useful" one and the one whose articulation is the reason for the discussion of Book 9. His introduction of Book 9 makes this clear:

> First we will discuss ability *(dunamis)* in its strictest sense, even though it is not the most useful sense for what we are now after; for ability and activity *(energeia)* are spoken of in more senses than those with respect to motion alone. But when we have talked about that sense, we will then, in the course of discussing activity, explain the others as well. (*Metaphysics* 9.1, 1045b35–1046a3)

These remarks of Aristotle, and particularly their implication that the ability related to activity is "more useful," should suggest to us that the discussion of activity and its related ability and of their distinction from motion and its related ability do not make up an appendix to the account of substance in the earlier books of the *Metaphysics;* they are meant to serve a purpose in the development of that account. In this chapter and the next, I offer an explanation of those distinctions and suggest what purpose they serve in the central argument of the *Metaphysics,* the argument concerning the nature of substance and therefore concerning being in general.

The elaboration in *Metaphysics* 9 of *energeia* and *dunamis* is an important moment in the complex argument concerning substance that begins with the opening of Book 7. That argument, as we just saw, reaches an impasse at the end of the book. For there we find ourselves unable to reconcile the conflicting claims of what have slowly emerged as central principles in the analysis of substance—matter and form. And in turn, we find ourselves unable to account for the unity of matter and form, or for the unity of the individual and its being—goals that the analysis has come to demand but has been unable to achieve. At the end of Book 8, a solution is promised that turns upon the apparent identity between, on the one hand, matter as ability—*dunamis*—and, on the other hand, form as activity—*energeia.* But for this solution to be successful, we need to understand in what sense matter and form are correlated with ability

and activity, and how this correlation may be thought to solve the problem of the unity of substance with which we are left after Books 7 and 8. This understanding, however, can be accomplished only when (in keeping with the *aporia* announced in Book 2 of the *Metaphysics,* 2.1, 996a9–12) we are able to recognize a sense of *dunamis* and of *energeia*—of ability and activity—that are not dependent upon concepts of motion and coming to be.

Such a sense is provided by the analysis of *energeia* and *dunamis* laid out, all too sketchily, in *Metaphysics* 9.6. Aristotle's claim at the heart of that chapter, I will suggest, may be thought of as an epitome of the argument in the central books of the *Metaphysics:* activity, Aristotle writes, is "in one sense as motion to ability, in another sense as substance to some matter" (*Metaphysics* 9.6, 1048b8). To understand that thought, I will suggest, will be to understand a central element in the subtle and complex ontology of substance. It will also help us understand the roles played in that ontology by the relation between activity and ability—*energeia* and *dunamis.*

In the course of our discussion, I hope to show that Aristotle's solution to the problem of substance's unity accounts, in a larger sense, for the unity of a subject and its being, and thus provides the necessary means for meeting the challenge of what I described as a "platonist" ontology. We will therefore see how the distinction between motion and activity provides for Aristotle a key to general ontology and not merely, as it were, to "ousiology"—to the theory of being and not merely to the theory of substance. With the account of activity and ability in Book 9, therefore, we will be able to understand the promise of *Metaphysics* 4.2 and 7.1—the promise that underlies the very project of the *Metaphysics*—that understanding substance will enable us to understand being as such (*Metaphysics* 4.2, 1003a33, 1003b17; 7.1, 1028b3–5).

2. The Distinction between Motion and Activity

I begin not with the distinction between two kinds of *dunamis,* but with the distinction that Aristotle marks in the second half of *Metaphysics* 9.6 between *kinesis* and *energeia,* motion and activity.

> Since among actions that have a limit, none is a completion, but is rather a thing relative to a completion—(as for example slimming is to slimness itself; when something is slimming, it is in that respect in motion, although that which it is in motion toward does not yet characterize it)—this sort of thing is not an action or at least not a complete one (just because it is not a completion). But that sort of action to which its completion belongs is a real action. So for example at the same time (*ἅμα*) one is seeing and has seen, is understanding and has understood, is thinking and has thought. But if you are learning, you have not at the same time learned, and if you are being cured you have not at the same time been cured. Someone, however, who is living well at the same time has lived well, and someone who is prospering has prospered. If that were not so, these things would have to come to an end at some time, as is the case with slimming. But in fact they do not; you are living and have lived. Of these actions, then, we should call one group *motions,* and the other *activities.* For every motion is incomplete: slimming, learning, walking, building; these are motions and are indeed incomplete. For one cannot at the same time be walking and have walked, or be building and have built, nor be coming to be and have come to be, nor be being moved and have been moved; the two things are different (*ἕτερον*), as in general are moving and having moved. But at the same time one has seen and sees; these are the same thing, as are thinking and having thought. So the latter of these I call an activity, and the former a motion. (*Metaphysics* 9.6, 1048b18–34)[2]

Aristotle distinguishes motions and activities by an appeal to differences in the relationship between present and perfect forms of the verb: seeing entails having seen, but the same is not true of building; building does not entail having built, but entails precisely not having built. Earlier readers of these remarks often supposed that the distinction Aristotle is here making concerns tense in the narrowest sense: the feature of verbs that represents actions differently placed along a simple time line relative to the utterance. The perfect according to such a view is a past tense, and so verbs in the perfect refer to events in the past; it is relative to that relationship between present and past that Aristotle was thought

to distinguish between motion and activity proper.[3] But it is by now clear that this view is mistaken; for it is a mistake to think of Aristotle's perfect as a tense and especially as a past tense. In Ancient Greek, the perfect is an aspectual marker. The aspect of a verb does not represent an action as taking place at any particular time relative to the utterance; it represents other facts about the action signified by the verb, either about its own temporal features or about other features of the action in relation to the speaker's time.[4] The perfect in Greek signifies a state that is the result of a completed action specified by the verb. The simple perfect is characteristically associated with a present state, and therefore with a present rather than a past tense. This is true in English as well: "I have seen" does not standardly mean "I saw (in the past)," but rather "I am (presently) in the state of having completed (i.e., perfected) an act of seeing."[5]

For many acts, completion or perfection requires that there have been a past time during which they were being completed or perfected. In order for me to have built a house, it must be the case that there was a time during which I was engaged in building the house. But this fact is a fact about the nature of building, not about the formal features of perfection as revealed in the grammatical perfect; it is indeed a feature of the very type of act that Aristotle in the passage before us describes as a motion, and precisely not a feature of that type of act he calls activity proper, the type termed *energeia*.

It would be almost perverse therefore to read Aristotle as here ascribing to *activities* precisely what is characteristic of *motions*, namely, that their perfection requires a past time during which the perfection is, so to speak, taking place. For it is a feature of activities that such past periods of perfecting are not required; an activity is the sort of thing that is perfected or completed in the very moment of its being enacted. This is not to say that activities cannot happen in time. An activity can indeed occupy time, but it is not the sort of thing that must take time. It is characteristic of a motion, on the other hand, that it must use time, and indeed use up time, in the act of accomplishing its perfection.[6]

When we see what Aristotle is in fact arguing, we will see that it is more importantly associated with the very features that bring motion and activity to our attention in the first place. For it will reveal the role

played in Aristotle's discussion of substance by his connection of matter and form with ability and activity. Aristotle's argument is essentially the same as one that he offers in a different context and for different purposes in the *Nicomachean Ethics.* There, explaining why pleasure is not a motion but an activity, he characterizes pleasure as analogous to seeing (which again serves as a paradigm of activity) in the following way:

> Seeing appears to be at any time complete; for it is not lacking anything which, coming later, would complete its form. Pleasure seems to be like this. For it is the sort of thing that is complete; at no time would you find a pleasure such that only if it lasts a little longer will its form be complete. And that is why it is not a motion. For every motion takes place in time and is aimed at some completion—building is like this for example—and it is only complete when it has accomplished that at which it aims. It is only complete therefore in the whole time it takes or at its last moment. . . . But the form of pleasure is complete at any moment. (*Nicomachean Ethics* X 4, 1174a14–1174b6)

It is because an activity does not need to await any further development to perfect or complete its being that it is complete and perfect at each and every present moment of its duration. And so the present and perfect of a verb that represents an activity are true simultaneously.[7] This is not because of facts about the activity's past and its present, but because of two facts about its present: it is happening, and it has accomplished in that happening the perfection marked by our saying it has happened. When I am seeing, there is no further activity that is required before I can say that I have seen: "at the same time, one has seen and sees" (*Metaphysics* 9.6, 1048b23).

We may wonder whether this is true of all activities such as Aristotle specifies; some commentators have found problems in his account.[8] Consider, for example, cases of seeing in which the object of seeing is itself a motion. In such cases, the characteristics of the object as a motion may seem to infect the seeing itself. If, for example, I am watching Stein fall, isn't it true to say that I have seen him fall only when he has fallen, and that while I am seeing him fall, I have not yet seen him fall?

This question confuses the seeing and the falling I see. While Stein is falling, he has not yet fallen, but whenever it is correct to say (1) "I see Stein falling," it is also correct to say (2) "I have seen Stein falling." And whenever it is correct to say (3) "I see Stein fallen" (lying quietly, for example, at the foot of the stairs, or outside the gates of Eden), it is also correct to say (4) "I have seen Stein fallen." It is easy to confuse (2) and (3), but wrong. Considering the ambiguity of (5) "I have seen Stein fall" may help us understand why they might be thought to be the same. But they are different just because falling and having fallen are different. If we keep this in mind we can see why (1) entails (2), and why (3) entails (4).

In the same way, I may completely enjoy a symphony without enjoying a complete symphony, but how could I completely build a building without building a complete building? The issues involved in such hybrid entities as seeing someone fall or enjoying a symphony, as well as in those entities that may be thought of as either an activity or a motion, are subjects for further thought. But it is nevertheless true, even if there are such complications in the case of hybrid entities, that there is a class of activities such as Aristotle distinguishes in which process and completion are one and the same thing.

But in the case of motions, the process, walking from Anaheim to Azusa, for example, is different from its completion, the state of having walked from Anaheim to Azusa, that is, having reached, and as a consequence being in, Azusa. Aristotle puts it simply (I have added an example): "One cannot simultaneously be walking [for example, to Azusa] and have walked [to Azusa]; they are different: *οὐ γὰρ ἅμα* [*εἰς τὴν Ἀζουσὰν*] *βαδίζει καὶ βεβάδικεν . . . ἀλλ' ἕτερον*" (*Metaphysics* 9.6, 1048b30).

Aristotle makes clear, again in *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.4, that something like Azusa has to be included in the account of a motion, as I have done in brackets above. This is necessary in order to distinguish between walking in the standard sense, which is a motion whose form is always specified by a whence and a whither (a walk, for example, from Anaheim to Azusa, or from McCorquodale's office to the coffee shop), and mere strolling, a humble but authentic instance of activity. Strolling—that is, taking a walk—may be its own end, but walking—in the sense of accomplishing a walk—has as its end being in the place one is walking

to, and the walker has not completed that walk until he has reached that place, and is there.

In the case of motion, then, these two things—moving and having moved—are, as Aristotle says, *ἕτερον*—they are different. The fact that he here uses the term *different* (*ἕτερον*) as a contrast to the Greek term I have translated *at the same time* (*ἅμα*) should make clear to us that the latter term does not signify at the same time in any casual sense. In the case of an activity, it is because action and perfection are one and the same thing that they must occur together and at the same time. In a motion, however, not only are the action and its completion different, but it is also impossible for them to exist together. In order that it be true that I have completed a motion, it must be true that the motion has ceased to exist. As long as I am still building, I have not yet built (here again, of course, one must supply an object—a particular building such as McCorquodale's house in Cucamonga). The instant it becomes true to say that I have built, I am no longer building. In a light moment, of course, I might describe myself as building and mean by it something analogous to strolling: the idle hammering of wood together. But if our verb were house-building, like Aristotle's *οἰκοδομεῖν*, this play would appear even more playful; that verb shows the other oriented nature of an action whose end is other than itself. A motion, therefore, is aimed at a completion outside itself, a completion whose realization means the death of that very motion whose purpose is to bring it about. This feature of motions, the fact that they are, to speak figuratively, modes of being that are suicidal, is critical to understanding the nature of motion, and it will here concern us as we try to understand the difference between motion and activity in the argument of the *Metaphysics*.

The difference between motion and activity proper, then, is the difference between two sorts of process: (1) a process or action (in a broad sense) whose end lies outside itself, and thus whose perfection lies outside itself, in some other being that it is devoted to bringing about, and (2) a process or action whose end (and thus perfection) is nothing other than itself, a process that constitutes and contains its own end and completion, and is thus perfect—*ἐντελής*—that is, complete in itself, and complete in itself because completed in itself. The fact that we may call such an action *ἐντελής*—perfect or complete—is the source of Aristot-

le's connection of activity with that fully realized state of being for which he coins a new technical term—*ἐντελέχεια*—the term once commonly Englished as *entelechy*.[9] An activity is such a fully realized being, for it has no end other than itself and is therefore fulfilled and completed in its very activity.

3. The Definition of Motion

We need to consider not only the respects in which motion differs from activity, but the respects in which it is, as Aristotle makes clear, itself a kind of activity. I have spoken of Aristotle as distinguishing between motion and activity *proper* precisely because of this fact, precisely because it is clear that he wants us to view motion as a kind of activity: "Motion appears to be a kind of activity, but one that is imperfect: *ἐνέργεια μέν τις εἶναι δοκεῖ, ἀτελὴς δέ*" (*Physics* 3.2, 201b31–32; *Metaphysics* 11.9, 1066a2–6).[10] It is, in other words, an activity, but one that is not perfect—*ἐντελὴς*—in the sense we have just articulated; it is rather imperfect—*ἀτελὴς*—lacking completion.

We have just seen what it means to say of a motion that it lacks completion; a motion is in the process of achieving its completion, but has not yet done so. In this it contrasts with an activity, which is its completion and therefore has done what it is doing at every moment it is doing it. But given this fact, why should Aristotle want to call a motion an activity at all? And what could it mean in light of the contrast of *Metaphysics* 9 to speak of an activity that is nonetheless incomplete?

In order to clarify Aristotle's meaning, we need to explore further his understanding of motion itself, and to do that I propose that we turn to the account of motion that is given in *Physics* 3.1 (and, whether by Aristotle himself or by a redactor, in *Metaphysics* 11.9). At the beginning of that account, Aristotle offers what reads like a definition of motion: "The realization of what is able to be [something] (*ἡ τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος ἐντελέχεια*), as such (*ᾗ τοιοῦτον*), is motion" (*Physics* 3.1, 201a11).[11] What does he mean by this apparent definition?

First, some remarks about my translation of Aristotle's definition. I have translated *δυνάμει ὄντος* by *is able to be* [*something*], although a far more common translation is what *exists potentially*. My translation is

part of the claim that *ability* is a better rendering of *dunamis* than is *potentiality,* as *activity* is a better rendering of *energeia* than is *actuality;* the success of this translation will in part depend upon whether we are enabled thereby to make interesting sense of Aristotle's definition. In addition, I have read here, as earlier, Aristotle's use of the verb *to be* as the place holder for a predicate: *is something or other.* My general sense that Aristotle intends the verb *to be* as a variable that takes predicates as its argument does not beg the question, since it is functionally equivalent to understanding it as existential with respect to certain entities; if x *can be A,* then there exists potentially a being, the entity A.

I have used *realization* as a translation of Aristotle's *ἐντελέχεια* for different reasons. For this translation incorporates an interesting ambiguity that we need to clarify early in our discussion. The term *realization* may refer either to a process or to the result of a process. In one sense, for example, *the realization of a person's hopes* may be said to be taking place in the unfolding of some event; but in another, it may be said to have come about as a result of that event. By making Aristotle say that motion is the *realization* of some ability, I mean to draw attention to that ambiguity in order to invite us to ask the following question: does Aristotle intend to define motion as a process or as a product?

It should be clear why our immediate temptation is to suppose that he means the former. For he is defining motion, that is, the process by which something's ability to be something, or the thing qua possessing that ability, is realized. In any case of motion, it is obvious that the product is not this process, but its result. For example, in the building of a house, the product is not the act of building or of being built, but the building, that is, the house itself, that results from this act.[12] So it is not in this sense of *realization* that the realization of bricks and stones qua able to be a house is said to be the motion of building a house, but in the sense of process. It is the realizing of bricks and stones qua able to be a house that Aristotle defines as the motion of building.

This is how Aristotle's definition has often been taken. Listen to this widely respected commentator, who writes that for Aristotle "motion is 'the realization of that which is potentially, as such.' I.e. if there is something that is actually x and potentially y, motion is the making actual

y-ness."[13] And elsewhere commenting directly upon Aristotle's central formulation of the definition, this same commentator is more explicit; "*ἐντελέχεια*," he writes, "must here mean 'actualization', not 'actuality': it is the *passage* from potentiality to actuality that is *kinesis*."[14] But this account of Aristotle's definition has to be wrong. I do not mean that Aristotle would have been unhappy with the description of motion as the realizing of ability, but it is not this description that he offers at the beginning of Book 3 of the *Physics* as a definition of motion.

In the first place, precisely because it must be true that motion is a process, a definition in these terms would be largely nugatory. To say that motion is the process of realization by which an ability to be something is realized is to define motion in terms of the very concept in question, that of a process. But the reason that the definition of motion is, as Aristotle describes it, so difficult is that it is unclear just what sort of thing the process of realizing an ability to be something is. How, then, could this be a helpful definition? It might, on such an account, be helpful in exhibiting connections between motion and the related concepts of *the ability to be something* and *the realization of such an ability,* but it could be an illuminating definition (if at all) only of one or both of these latter concepts; as a definition of motion, it is empty and uninformative.[15]

We can imagine a response to this argument. For there is a sense of *realizing* in which, according to Aristotle, not every realizing is a motion. The realizing of a skill or disposition to act in a certain way, such as occurs, for example, when someone who is wise exercises his wisdom, is not a motion. In such cases, the realizing consists in exercising a capacity in the form of an activity (*De Anima* 2.5, 417b10–12). This is precisely an expression of the distinction between two senses of *energeia* that has led us in the first place to a consideration of motion. We might then understand Aristotle to be defining motion as one species of a broader genus of realization, of which the realizing of a disposition in the form of its exercise—a capacity in operation—is another.

In a moment I will suggest that this characterization of Aristotle's views is importantly correct. The distinction between realizations that represent completed motions and those that constitute the exercise of a dispositional capacity is a central distinction in his views on a range of

subjects. More to the point, the concept of a realization that is the exercise of a dispositional capacity is central both to the argument we are here considering and, as I have argued, to his larger argument concerning activity and being.

But although the global contrast between a process of realization and the exercise of a dispositional capacity is important, it is important because Aristotle contrasts the latter with motion in his definition of motion. To further complicate matters, it is, as we will see in a moment, precisely in terms of such a mode of realization that he means to define motion. And even if this response were correct in characterizing motion as one species of realization, it would still fail to capture the force of Aristotle's definition. Once again, it would fail to distinguish between a true characterization of motion and the specific definition with which we are concerned. Nowhere in that definition are any indications given that we are being asked to distinguish motion as a certain kind of realization distinct from that by which a disposition is realized.

There are yet other objections to reading *realization* in Aristotle's definition as signifying a process. First, for this reading to make sense, the term *ἐντελέχεια* must itself signify a process and not a state or a condition that might result from a process. There is a sense in which it might be correct, although misleading, to speak in this way of *energeia*. But although Aristotle does speak of motion as a kind of *energeia* (recall that this is the fact we are in the process of considering), he consistently employs the term *ἐντελέχεια* in versions of the definition of motion that is the immediate object of our attention.[16] And this term, as its etymology shows, signifies a state of completeness or perfection and not a process by which such perfection is achieved.[17]

Furthermore, reading *realization* as signifying a process renders mysterious the critical phrase in the definition *as such—ᾗ τοιοῦτον*. For a realization *qua* anything at all, given the sense of *realization* proposed, would be some sort of motion. There would therefore be no point to the inclusion of this phrase in the definition, whereas it appears that Aristotle takes the phrase to be a crucial and important part of the definition.

Finally, if we take the phrase *as such* literally, the definition on the account we are considering will not give us what we want. The realization,

for example, of bronze qua able to be a statue will not be the making of a statue, but the process by which bronze comes to be able to be a statue. But what might such a process be in which bronze comes to be able to be a statue, other than that in which it becomes bronze? And this process cannot be what Aristotle has in mind; in the passage following his definition of motion, he makes clear that it is not the realization of bronze qua bronze that is motion.

> The [realization] of what is able to be [something], when it is actively realized not qua itself, but qua movable, is motion. Here is what I mean by *qua:* bronze is able to be a statue; but it is not the realization of bronze qua bronze that is motion. For it is not the same thing to be bronze and to be able to be something. If they were the same—without qualification and by definition—then the fulfillment of the bronze qua bronze would be motion. But they are not. (*Physics* 3.1, 201a28–33)

We might try to imagine a process by which bronze becomes specifically empowered to become a statue, or by which bricks and stones are made buildable. But even if there were such a process, we would still not have the definition that Aristotle means to give. For the realization of the buildable qua buildable would then be the process by which the buildable becomes buildable, rather than, as Aristotle has in mind, building, that is, the process by which the buildable becomes built.

It seems clear then that when we use *realization* as a translation of Aristotle's *ἐντελέχεια*, it must be understood as an accomplishment that is realized, and not as a process itself by which some accomplishment is brought about. And surely this conclusion accords with what Aristotle intends by the term he has coined. An entelechy, as I suggested a moment ago, is a condition in which an end is already present, not an act, so to speak, of entelechizing—an *ἐντελέχεια* and not, as it were, an *ἐντελέχησις*.

But what about our initial concern that only a definition in terms of a process would yield the motion rather than the result of the motion? If we are indeed to understand the concept of *ἐντελέχεια* that Aristotle has in mind in the sense I have just offered, then won't the definition give

us the wrong building—the building that is being built, rather than the process of building by which it is built?

The force of this question will become clearer if we turn for a moment to a second question: what in fact *is* meant by that part of the definition that characterizes motion as the realization of what is able to be something *as such?* What do the words *as such* add to the definition? They seemed superfluous in the previous interpretation; if they are not, just what is their force?

A helpful beginning is to note that anything able to be something is at the same time some other thing that it is not simply able to be, but actively is. Bricks and stones, for example, which are able to be a house are bricks and stones; they are indeed the bricks and stones able to be a house. It is not the realization of bricks and stones qua bricks and stones that is relevant to building a house, but their realization qua able to be a house. So Aristotle observes, in the text we have just read, that motion is the realization of something able to be something, not qua what the thing actually is at the moment, but rather qua what it is able to be.

But when the matter is put this way, it is easy to feel the force of our concern that such an account will yield not the process of building, but the physical building that is a result of that process.[18] The commentator I quoted above is sensitive to this concern, and his solution is both ingenious and interesting. He writes:

> An aggregate of bricks, stones, etc. may be regarded (1) as so many bricks, stones, etc. (2) as potentially a house, (3) as potentially being in course of being fashioned into a house. The movement of building is the realization not (1) of the materials (they are, previously to the movement of building, already actually these materials), nor (2) of their potentiality of being a house (the house is the realization of this) but (3) of their potentiality of being fashioned into a house.[19]

This passage is clearly intended as an interpretation, not an emendation of Aristotle's theory, and it might appear to be a consequent of Aristotle's remark at the end of the chapter in which motion is first defined. Aristotle there argues, by way of indicating the correctness of his definition, that

> motion occurs just when this very realization (ἐντελέχεια) occurs, and neither before nor after. For it is possible for any given thing to be sometimes active, sometimes not (ὁτὲ μὲν ἐνεργεῖν ὁτὲ δὲ μή); the buildable is an example of this, and the activity (ἐνέργεια) of the buildable qua buildable is building. For either building or the house is the activity of the buildable; but when it is a house, it is no longer buildable, whereas what is being built is the buildable. (*Physics* 3.1, 201b9–13)

In a moment I will suggest the importance of the fact that Aristotle here mentions the *energeia* as well as the ἐντελέχεια of the buildable. Suppose for now that the sense of realization is the same as that which our commentator has urged must be in play in motion's central definition. It then becomes difficult to believe that this passage expresses what he takes it to express. For if it does, Aristotle appears to define motion as the realization of a certain ability, but it turns out that the ability is the ability to be in motion. It would be strange if this is what Aristotle intended as an instructive definition of *motion*. Once again, it could be a correct description of being in motion, and it might serve as a definition or part of a definition of *realization* or of *ability:* part of the list, for instance, of examples of the opposition given in *Metaphysics* 9 (9.6, 1048a37–1048b5). But it could no more be an instructive definition of *motion* than *leporine is the realization of what is able to be leporine qua able to be leporine* could be an instructive definition of *leporine*.

Secondly, the suggestion that the realization to which Aristotle is referring is that of the object's ability to become rather than to be other than it is, of the ability of bricks and stones, for example, to be built into a house, finds no substantiation in the text. Not only does Aristotle nowhere suggest this as the ability he has in mind, he is explicit that it is something's ability to be and not to become other than it is in terms of which he means to define the motion by which it becomes that. In explicating the phrase *as such,* he distinguishes between bronze (a) qua able to be a statue and (b) qua bronze. When a number of lines later he concludes that motion is the realization of what is able to be something qua able to be it, he is clearly referring back to (a) the bronze qua able to be

a statue, not qua able to be in the process of becoming a statue; that possibility is never mentioned (*Physics* 3.1, 201b4–7).

So we are led back to our first concern; if the ability that Aristotle has in mind is the ability of bronze to be a statue, or of bricks and stones to be a house, then it seems his definition will give us the finished product, the statue or the house, rather than the process or motion by which the statue is wrought or the house built. If we had followed our earlier inclination to take the definiens to refer to a process, there would, of course, be no such problem; for it is only when we understand *realization* in the sense of product that a definition in terms of bricks and stones qua able to be a house threatens to yield the house itself rather than the act of building. It was precisely for this reason that we felt tempted in the first place to understand the definiens as referring to a process.

All of this makes clear that we cannot follow both inclinations. We cannot identify the realization of the definition to be a process, while at the same time identifying the ability of the definition as that which bricks and stones, for example, have of being built into a house; the two views are incompatible. For if we talk of realization in the sense of process, the realization of the ability of bricks and stones to be built into a house will not be the process of building, but the process of that process coming into being. It will be, in other words, the movement by which bricks and stones begin being built into a house: not the first stage of building a house, but the process by which that first stage begins. But Aristotle thinks that there is no such process. As a counter to Parmenidean and Zenonian arguments and for reasons internal to his theory, it is important for him to deny, as he does throughout Books 5 and 6 of the *Physics,* that there is a period of time in which motion begins, and that something's beginning to undergo motion is itself a motion.

So here are two independent and differently unhappy accounts of Aristotle's definition of motion. On one account, Aristotle is understood to be defining motion as a process: the realizing of an ability to be something by which it becomes such. On the other, he is understood to be defining motion as a product: the realization of an ability to be in motion.[20] These accounts articulate theories of motion that are by no means contradictory, but as accounts of Aristotle's definition, they are incompatible and embody complementary difficulties.[21]

Can we frame an alternative account of Aristotle's definition that avoid the difficulties of, on the one hand, capturing the product rather than the motion and, on the other, defining motion in terms of itself? Such an account will have to recognize these three things about Aristotle's definition of motion as the realization of an ability to be something: (1) the realization in terms of which he defines motion is not itself a process; (2) the ability in question is an ability to be and not to go through the process of becoming something—the ability of bricks and stones, for example, to be a house; (3) the definition yields motion and not its result, the act of building for example and not the building which is its product. In the next section, I will offer just such an account.

4. Ability qua Ability

Suppose I am told that over the summer my friend Lagrange has improved considerably. Normally, a context or an additional statement would be needed to make clear in what respect—qua what—he has improved, and such a context or an additional statement would further specify the proper object of improvement. To be told that he has improved, for example, qua speaker of French, is to be told that he has improved his command of the language (not, say, his chess openings or his moral character). The same is true in modal contexts; to say that bricks and stones have been realized qua able to be a house is to say that their ability to be a house has been realized (and not, say, their ability to be a bridge).

This fact that the words *qua such and such* specify in those cases the respect in which something has been realized may not seem of great help in understanding Aristotle's definition, for in that definition, the *qua* phrase that indicates the respect in which the subject has been realized itself indicates an ability to be something. If we are, therefore, to understand it, we will need first to understand more clearly what we mean when we speak of the realization of an ability to be something.

What does it mean to speak of the realization of an ability to be something? Here is a natural answer: the realization of an ability to be something is being that something. And it is just this answer that caused us trouble, for if it is correct, then Aristotle's definition seems to capture the product of a motion rather than the motion itself, the physical building,

as it were, and not the act of building. Is there an alternative? Could realizing the ability to be something have a meaning other than one achieved via replacing that ability by the being it is an ability to be?

Consider again my friend Lagrange, but this time suppose I am told that he has spent the summer improving his stutter, perhaps at Paris's renowned Académie Internationale du Bégaiement. I should then normally expect him to speak more fluently, less haltingly, in short, with less of a stutter; indeed, if I am told that he has perfectly improved his stutter, I might expect to find him with no stutter at all. This is mildly paradoxical; improving a stutter turns out to be equivalent to destroying it.

But we all understand what is going on. Imagine now, however, that Lagrange is an actor working on a role that demands a noticeable and convincing stutter, or that he is a secret agent who must for some recondite reason exhibit a speech impediment; he is impersonating an international terrorist who has operated underground and is known only to have a noticeable stutter. In any of these cases, my expectations upon hearing that he has been improving his stutter might be rather different; I might then expect someone who stutters not less, but more.

There is nothing mysterious about these facts. They are instances of a general feature of terms that signify states of incompletion or imperfection. When such terms are the objects of other terms that signify completion, perfection, fulfillment, and so on, an ambiguity results: does talk of perfecting an imperfection signify the imperfection's attenuation or its amplification? Think of fragments: upon hearing that a papyrologist has completed a fragment of an ancient poem, should I expect a whole poem or merely a whole fragment?

At one level, this is simply a linguistic ambiguity, and we can, if necessary, make clear within the language which sense we are intending. One way of doing this, which locates an uneasiness that might have been felt with my earlier example, is the following. Since a stutter is imperfect speech, we might disambiguate the phrase "improving his stutter" by saying in the one case that Lagrange had improved his stutter qua speech, or that he (a stutterer) had improved himself qua speaker, and in the other that he had improved his stutter qua stutter, or himself qua stutterer.

Behind all of this is a fact that Aristotle finds revealing. *Coming to be* may be thought of either in terms of an underlying and continuing sub-

ject that undergoes a change from some privation to some being or in terms of the privation from which the coming to be proceeds. *Privation* here, note, is not being used in the stronger sense of what a subject has been deprived of—in other words, not in the philosophical sense of lack—as blindness may be said to be a privation in mammals but not in rocks. It is used rather in the blander logical sense of a negative or dependent predicate: Lagrange's not being educated, for example, or not being in Cucamonga, the papyrus constituting a fragment of a poem. So consider coming to be in these cases: the training by which Lagrange becomes educated, or the journey by which he comes to be in Cucamonga, or the restoration by which the fragment becomes a whole poem. Aristotle points out that in describing (for example) the first of these cases, we can say either that a person becomes educated or that the uneducated (an uneducated person) becomes educated (an educated person). Therefore, he goes on to argue, the subject that changes, though numerically one, is not one in being; that is, it can be described in different ways, in this case either as human or as that which is uneducated. And this difference in being has consequences for how we think of change.

> For it is not the same thing to be a human and to be uneducated; the one endures, while the other does not. What is not an opposite endures, for the human endures, but the not educated or uneducated does not endure, nor does the compound of the two, the uneducated human. We speak of becoming that from this, rather than of this becoming that, with respect to what does not endure, as we speak of becoming educated from being uneducated, not from being human. (*Physics* 1.7, 189b32–190a24)[22]

This distinction between the coming to be of a subject and the coming to be from a privation corresponds to the ambiguity in Lagrange's stuttering. Where improving his stutter resulted in greater fluency, the stutter was the privation from which the change occurred and in whose annihilation it resulted. But where the improvement resulted in an even greater halting and stammering, the stutter was the subject (at least the proximate subject) of the change.

And so in general with terms that, like *improvement,* signify completion or perfection or fulfillment; *the perfection of an imperfection* will signify sometimes the attenuation of that imperfection and sometimes its amplification, depending on whether the imperfection in question is thought of as the privation from which the act of perfecting proceeds or as the subject of that act. In the former case we might want to speak of the *privative* perfection of an imperfection, and in the latter of the *constitutive* perfection of an imperfection. Any privation therefore, as well as that from which a perfection results, may be the subject of a perfection and therefore itself that in which the perfection results; *the perfection of a privation* may therefore refer to the latter as well as to the former case, to a constitutive as well as to a privative perfection.[23]

Here is the version of this fact pertinent to our concerns: the realization of the ability to be something may be constitutive as well as privative, for such an ability may be the subject of a process of realization and not the privation from which such a process proceeds and which gives way to a resultant product. In such a case *the realization of the ability to be something* will refer not to being that something, but to being able to be it.

This fact provides an answer to the question that we asked concerning the force of the phrase *ᾗ τοιοῦτον—as such;* it will provide us with a sense of that phrase that will not result in the difficulties we earlier encountered. This phrase in Aristotle's definition signals that it is the constitutive and not the privative realization that is being referred to. When Aristotle describes motion, in other words, as the realization of an ability to become something other *as such,* he does not mean a realization that results from that ability; he means a realization that is that ability in its full being.

We might have suspected that the phrase *as such* plays this role in Aristotle's definition if we had paid closer attention to the case of Lagrange's stuttering. When we spoke of Lagrange improving his stutter qua stutter rather than qua speech, we indicated thereby that the stutter was the subject of the improvement rather than the privation from which something proceeded. Similarly, to speak of the *realization of an ability qua ability* is to signal that the realization is constitutive and not privative.

We can now attend to Aristotle's own words about motion with greater understanding: "When the buildable, insofar as we describe it as just that, is realized (ἐντελεχείᾳ), it is being built, and this is building; and similarly with learning and healing and revolving and maturing and aging" (*Physics* 3.1, 201a16–19). And in general, "the [realization] of what is able to be [something], when it is fully real and active (ἐνεργῇ) not *qua* itself, but *qua* movable, is motion" (*Physics* 3.1, 201a27–29). It is, in other words, only when bricks and stones are being built that they are fully realizing precisely their ability to be a house *qua* that ability. For it is only then that the ability is active as a constitutive realization, prior to the coming to be of its privative realization, a realization that occurs when bricks and stones qua buildable disappear, to be replaced by the brick and stone *house* that has been built.

5. Levels of Realization

How are we to understand the notion of ability being active or inactive qua ability? What, in other words, is the distinction, in terms of their ability to be a house, between bricks and stones when they are lying in a pile and when they are being built?

Here I want to invoke another distinction of Aristotle's that will become important in our discussion, particularly in Chapter 3; this is the distinction between what we might call first and second levels of realization, or as it is more usually called, the distinction between first and second actuality or first and second entelechy. Aristotle discusses this distinction most explicitly in the *De Anima,* where he employs it extensively in his theory of soul. Consider speaking French. There are, on the view Aristotle elaborates, two different senses in which we may attribute to someone the ability to speak French. Humans in general have the ability to speak French in that they have the capacity to learn any language and to come to speak it. A normal infant, for example, is able to speak French in the sense in which a dog or a dolphin is not able, even though in another sense she is unable to speak if she has yet to learn the language. But if the infant lives in Paris and grows to adulthood, she will eventually be able to speak French in the latter sense, one that contrasts not with a dog or dolphin, but with a native of Anaheim, for example,

who does not speak French, or with another infant who lives in Paris. Both of these lack the ability to speak French that an adult French speaker has, even though both are able to speak French in a sense that dogs are not.

Here is how Aristotle puts it, using an example somewhat less specific than that of speaking French:

> We need to distinguish different senses of ability and realization, since up to now we have been speaking of them without qualification. On the one hand, there is the sense in which someone understands as when we say a human understands, meaning that humans are among those things that understand and have understanding; on the other hand, there is the sense as when we say that someone who has an understanding of grammar understands. Each of these is able, but not in the same sense; the one is able because his kind and matter are of a certain sort, the other because if he wishes he is able to understand actively (*θεωρεῖν*), as long as nothing external prevents him. (*De Anima* 2.5, 417a21–28)

We could say that humans in general (and our infant Parisian in particular) are generically able to speak French, whereas our adult Parisian is dispositionally able to speak French.

Both of these abilities are abilities to speak French. Their full realization, therefore, is seen in someone actively speaking French: an adult Parisian, for example, who at some given moment is talking with his wife at breakfast, uttering sentences in French in a correct and meaningful way. So Aristotle immediately notes that "there is in addition the person who is actively understanding (*θεωρῶν*); he understands in its full realization (*ἐντελεχείᾳ*) and in the strictest sense: this particular A, for example" (*De Anima* 2.5, 417a29–30).

Given the relationship of the two senses of being able to speak French to this common and ultimate realization in someone actively speaking French (in Aristotle's example, actively engaged in *θεωρία*), it is clear that we have to distinguish as well between two senses of speaking French, insofar as this contrasts to merely being able to speak French.

For we say that an infant is able to speak French, as distinct not only from a dog, who is unable to do so, but also from an adult French speaker who has realized the infant's ability. But it is immaterial whether such a speaker is silent or speaking. There is, therefore, another sense in which the former of these—the silent speaker—is, as it were, not speaking French, by which we are able to distinguish him from the latter who clearly is speaking French. We may say that the former *dispositionally* speaks French, while the latter *actively* speaks French.[24]

Notice that in our explication of Aristotle's two levels of realization, it emerges that our silent adult both is dispositionally able to speak French and dispositionally speaks French. This highlights the fact that being dispositionally able to speak French and dispositionally speaking French are materially equivalent. And this expresses the fact that Aristotle would express by saying that a first realization (sometimes called a first actuality) is an ability or capacity, and one whose realization is the activity that constitutes a second realization (or a second actuality).

There is therefore a sense in which our infant's ability to speak French is a double ability; it is, as it were, the ability to be able to speak French (where *to speak French* refers to what we have called *actively speaking* French), as distinct from the ability of an adult French speaker, who has realized that ability and already *is* able to speak French. This account may provide a sense of relative degrees of ability of the sort that we sought, and considering it, we might be led to depict motion as comparable to a first realization, intermediate as it is between a subject's ability to become other than it is and the resultant state of actually being other.

The attractiveness of such a claim may be highlighted by asking a further question: what is the proper realization of the generic ability to speak French? Is it dispositionally speaking French or actively speaking French? In a sense, both answers are correct, and one can imagine the arguments in favor of each. But although dispositionally speaking French is the proximate realization of an infant's generic ability, the conceptual and ontological priority enjoyed by actively speaking French, the degree to which the identity of dispositionally speaking French is dependent upon such active speaking, should lead us to say that this is the proper realization of an infant's ability.

Similarly, although Aristotle sometimes speaks as though in such cases there were two different abilities with different realizations, such that the proper realization of one could not be that of the other, he more often speaks as though there were but a single realization for which both abilities, though in a different sense, are the ability. Thus he sometimes describes the distinction in terms of being nearer to and further from some goal; the sleeping geometer, he says, is more distant from his realization than the waking, the waking from the actively theorizing (*Generation of Animals* 2.1, 735a9–12). Elsewhere, the distinction is illustrated by the fact that we say both of a boy that he is able to be a general and of an adult that he is able to be a general, but it would be odd to suggest that the realization of a boy's ability to be a general is his being an adult (*De Anima* 2.5, 417b31–418a1).

Still, dispositionally speaking French—the dispositional ability to speak French—is the proximate realization of someone's generic ability to do so; there should be a way in which we can refer to it as such. Earlier we marked a generic ability to speak French in contrast to a dispositional ability by saying (somewhat fancifully) that our infant Parisian is able to be able to speak French, whereas her adult counterpart is just able to speak French (where once more *to speak French* refers in both cases to what we have called *actively* speaking French). In this fanciful mode, we may say that speaking French in the sense in which an adult is said to speak French when silent (dispositionally speaking French, or being dispositionally able to speak French) is the realization of the ability to be able to speak French (actively), the ability that is exhibited by an infant Parisian, or by humanity in general. Dispositionally speaking French may therefore be said to be the privative realization of the generic ability to speak French, or the constitutive realization of the dispositional ability. We might say, to distinguish it from actively speaking French, that it is the realization of the ability to speak French *qua ability*.

We have thus been led by this final step into corridors of expression that are odd, but that should be understandable to a reader of Aristotle. We should now see the attractiveness of comparing motion to a first realization, a disposition like someone's ability to speak a language that he knows. In both cases, we are presented with a singular being, something

that in one sense is an ability and yet in another is the realization of an ability, poised as it were between this prior ability of which it is the realization and a further realization for which it is the ability. When Aristotle introduces his discussion of motion by observing that "there is that which just actively is (*ἐνεργείᾳ μόνον*), that which is able to be (*δυνάμει*) and that which both is able to be and actively is," (*Metaphysics* 11.9, 1065b5–8)[25] he is referring to a set of beings of this sort (and not as various readers have imagined, to pure intelligences, God, prime matter, or the void). And in both cases the singular being is the constitutive realization of an ability, and the privative realization of a double ability.

Now apply these considerations more directly to motion. When I am in Anaheim, I am able to be in Azusa; all I need to do, which I am also able to do, is to go there. But that ability—the ability to be in Azusa—lies dormant, so to speak, until I leave Anaheim and begin going there; it becomes active, in other words, only as I embark upon a journey to Azusa.[26] There is then a sense (so odd that only a philosopher would want to use it) in which situated in Anaheim I am only able to be able to be in Azusa, whereas motoring on the freeways from Anaheim to Azusa, I am, as it were, actively being able to be in Azusa. And so my journey to Azusa is the constitutive realization of my ability to be in Azusa, or of myself qua able to be in Azusa; it is the exercise of that ability. It puts the ability, we might say, into practice. There is, to be sure, a more ordinary sense in which being in Azusa is the realization of my ability to be in Azusa; but in that case, the ability is seen as *privation from which,* and not as *subject of* the realization.

Consider in the same light our earlier example (and Aristotle's) of building. Bricks and stones are able to be a house, that is, they are buildable into a house, and can thus become one. But they are exercising this buildability only when they are actually being built. There is therefore a sense (once again odd) in which bricks and stones lying about are only able to be buildable into a house or (odder still) are only able to be able to be a house. The process of being built into a house is then the privative realization of this (double) ability; in this sense our earlier commentator is right when he describes building as the realization of the bricks' and stones' potentiality of being fashioned into a house, and it is perhaps

the possibility of putting the matter this way that led him to suppose it is how Aristotle puts the matter.[27] But another way to say that building is the privative realization of the ability to be able to be a house is to say that it is the constitutive realization of the bricks and stones qua able to become a house, and it is this way that Aristotle chooses. Motion is, on his view, the constitutive realization of what is able to be something, as such.

We can now understand the passage at the end of the first chapter of *Physics* 3. That passage, recall, led us to think—incorrectly—that Aristotle must be defining motion either as a process or as the product of realizing an ability to be in motion. For otherwise, it seemed, we would be left with the product of the motion rather than with the motion itself. What Aristotle says is quite simple and straightforward. The expression *the realization of the buildable* can mean building or the product of building, that is, the house. But by the time the house is there, the buildable has been realized in such a way that it is no longer buildable. It is, on the contrary, when the buildable is being built that it is most actively being itself precisely qua buildable. Therefore the realization of the buildable qua buildable, that is, the constitutive realization of being buildable, must be the process of building.

6. Motion as Incomplete Activity

Although the usefulness of comparing motion to a first realization—the dispositional ability to speak French, for example—is thus considerable, it must not blind us to the important differences between these instances of being intermediate: motion, which is intermediate between an inert potentiality and its full actualization, and the ability to speak French, which is intermediate between our human ability to speak and actually speaking French. To see these differences, we need to look more closely at what Aristotle says about the distinctions explored in the last section. For the kinds of abilities distinguished are more seriously different than we have made them out to be. Most importantly, they differ with respect to the mode in which their ends are achieved and in which the ability in each case is realized.

Aristotle points out that of the things said to be able in the different senses he has distinguished (again his example is understanding, rather

than speaking French), "the one is able because his kind and matter are of a certain sort, the other because if he wishes he is able [for example] to understand actively, as long as nothing external prevents him" (*De Anima* 2.5, 417a26–28). Accordingly, he goes on to say, the realizing of the ability is in each case different. As he says, "the one is a change of quality, achieved by repeated transitions from one state to its contrary—*ὁ μὲν . . . ἀλλοιωθεὶς καὶ πολλάκις ἐξ ἐναντίας μεταβαλὼν ἕξεως*" (*De Anima* 2.5, 417a30–31). But realization in the other case is merely a transition, if it may be called that, "from having but not actively exercising, to actively exercising—*ὁ δ' ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν μὴ ἐνεργεῖν δέ, εἰς τὸ ἐνεργεῖν*" (*De Anima* 2.5, 417a31–417b1). The one is an actual change of attributes; the other is merely the conversion of a capacity from being inoperative to being in operation, from inactivity to activity.

This latter mode of realization—the realization that occurs when what has been inactive becomes active—is simply the exercise of the capacity in question. This is what takes place when a French speaker, able to speak French, exercises that ability by actively speaking French, or when a wise person exercises his wisdom, or in general, when a disposition to act—a skill or a dispositional capacity—is brought into operation and is realized in its exercise, that is, in appropriate action.[28] We can call this transition *activation;* but Aristotle entertains serious and well-founded reservations about calling such activation a transition at all. At least, he says, we must recognize that there are quite different kinds of transition (*De Anima* 2.5, 417b6–8).

Now we can see why in the case of abilities that exhibit the structure of first and second realization—capacities like understanding or the ability to speak French—the acquisition of the ability differs from its exercise. For the acquisition—achieving a first realization such as happens when someone learns to speak French—is a realization of the former sort. But the mode of realization by which that dispositional capacity is brought into operation—the turn from inactivity to activity, from silence to the act of speaking—is a realization of the second sort, an instance simply of the exercise of a power or capacity.

Figure 2.1 shows how we might picture the relationship among the various stages of the ability to speak a language. There is a change from

stage 1 to stages 2 and 3; but stages 2 and 3 are really the same thing, differing only by whether or not a capacity is active:

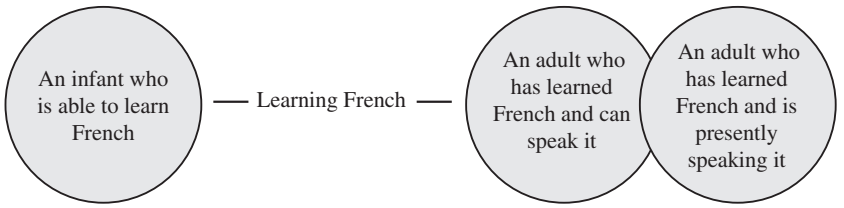

Figure 2.1. The Process of Learning French

Figure 2.2 shows, on the other hand, what an analogous view of the stages of the motion of bricks and stones being built into a house might look like. In this case, the change is from stages 1 and 2, which are the same thing differing only by whether or not a capacity is active, to a different stage 3, which is the realization of the potentiality found in stages 1 and 2.

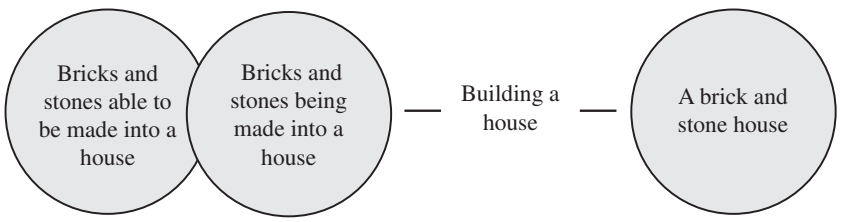

Figure 2.2. The Process of Building a House

So although there are similarly two extremes and a middle term in the fine structure of motion, the situation is importantly different from that of, say, learning a language. For in motion the activation takes place not between the second and third terms, but between the first and second.

It is not, in other words, motion that is the proper analogue of a dispositional capacity, but the ability of which the motion is the (constitutive) realization. The analogy, in other words, ought to be drawn in the following way: as the exercise of a disposition is to that disposition, for example, actively speaking French to the dispositional ability to speak French, so is motion to the ability of something to be other than it is, for example, the motion by which bricks and stones are built into a house to

the ability for being a house which those bricks and stones exhibit when they are not being built, and so in general is the movable in motion to the movable at rest.

This is one of the reasons that there is, as I noted earlier, no motion by which motion comes into being, and, what is the same thing, no motion by which an ability comes to be realized as an ability. There may be a motion by which an object acquires an ability, and it is indeed a motion by which that ability is realized privatively, that is, by which something's ability to be other than it is is realized by the thing's becoming other, changing, for example, from hot to cold. But there is no motion by which an ability is realized in its constitutive being, no motion, that is, by which it comes to be an ability qua ability. Once an ability has been acquired, only the act of exercising a power is needed for motion to begin. And there are, Aristotle believes, arguments that show why this must be the case.[29]

It is not true, of course, that the buildable exercises its buildability by its own agency. But the exercise of many dispositions is not wholly within the power of their subjects; sensation is one notable instance (*De Anima* 2.5, 417b19–21). The buildable is brought to the full realization of its buildability, that is, to the constitutive realization of its ability to be a house, only by the agency of the builder, as he in turn exercises his capacity to build, makes active his skill in the act of building. These activities, as Aristotle repeatedly points out, are different only in definition; building and being built are instances of those paired beings—moving and being moved and more generally action and passion—that are one and the same activity, differing only as the way from Athens to Thebes differs from the way from Thebes to Athens (*Physics* 3.3, 202a10–20; *De Anima* 3.2, 425b26–426a1).

It is only to be expected then that building, like being built, is in one sense an activity, though in another it is a motion. It should not, therefore, surprise us to find Aristotle cautioning that it would be "wrong to say that the thinker in thinking undergoes a change, just as it would be wrong to say this of the builder when he builds" (*De Anima* 2.5, 417b8–11). At other times, however, building is clearly classified as a motion. For building and being built are indeed motions (one and the same motion), but each is at the same time the exercise of a dispositional first realization

and is therefore an activity. In the one case the exercise is that of being buildable, in the other case that of being a builder.

Motion, then, is a capacity exercised qua that capacity. It is thus an activity, the full exercise of an ability qua ability, or more precisely, the activity of a subject that is able to be something just insofar as it is characterized by that ability. It should now be clear why Aristotle says that "motion is a kind of activity, but incomplete (*ἀτελής*)." The reason for this, he goes on to say, "is that the potential of which it is the activity is incomplete" (*Physics* 3.2, 201b31–33; *Metaphysics* 11.9, 1066a20–22).[30] This cannot mean that there is some special kind of incomplete ability, the realization of which is incomplete and is motion. For all mere ability is incomplete or unperfected—*ἀτελής*. The point is rather that motion is the constitutive realization of something that is itself essentially incomplete, and because the constitutive realization of something is simply that thing in its full being, motion itself is incomplete.

The proper activities that we saw Aristotle contrast to motions at the beginning of this chapter exhibit a different structure. If the relation of motion to ability is that of activity to disposition, and if a disposition is itself a kind of ability for some other being, a motion remains incomplete even in its realization. But in the case of activity proper, realization, as we saw, has no end other than itself. Consequently, in being realized as ability, it is at one and the same time realized as the being which that ability is the ability for. There is, in other words, something in the case of motion that is intermediate, namely, the motion itself. But in the case of the exercise of a capacity, what is analogous to the motion is one and the same thing as what is analogous to the resultant state the motion is directed toward, for activation is nothing other than the activity it brings about. There is therefore no distinction between realization of the ability qua ability and qua what the ability aims to achieve.

This fact may be put in terms of our earlier discussion: in all cases of activity proper, realization is constitutive, never privative. In cases of motion, however, the ultimate realization is privative, but there is an intermediate constitutive realization. This is essentially how Aristotle characterizes the two modes of transition when he says that "the one, a change of qualities, is with respect to privation, the other is with respect to dispositional qualities (*ἕξεις*) and nature" (*De Anima* 2.5, 417b14–16).

The sense in which motion is incomplete, then, is the sense in which it is *ἀτελής*—incomplete—in the literal sense, that is, the sense that it does not contain its own *τέλος*—its own end—but is directed toward an end outside itself. Putting the matter this way explains from another perspective the self-destructive dimension of motion we noted earlier. For motion is the realization of a subject's ability to be other than it is, an ability that is thus aimed ultimately at a state of being other than the motion and fatal to it. Motion does not, therefore, just happen to cease; its essential activity is devoted to ceasing. Its being is autosubversive, for its whole purpose and project is one of self-annihilation.

The essential self-destructive character of motion brings out what is ultimately wrong with comparing motion to a first realization such as a dispositional skill. For while motion is aimed at a realization that lies outside itself and that brings about its destruction, the exercise of a dispositional skill preserves and often indeed enriches it. The completion of a house, toward which the process of building the house is aimed, brings an end to that process, whereas it would be more than just absurd to say that someone cannot speak French while speaking French; it would be exactly contrary to the truth—perversely contrary to the truth. Speaking French is just the full exercise of the ability to speak French; it is that ability in operation. To say that someone can speak French is to predict that on some occasion he will utter French sentences, and to say that a house is being built is to predict that on some occasion there will be a house. And these facts are very different from one another. For the existence of the house is proof that it was, but is no longer, being built, whereas the uttering of French sentences is proof that the speaker can, and under normal circumstances in the future will, speak French. And so in general: this is simply another face of the fact that motions lead to ends other than themselves, whereas activities are their own ends.

7. Motion in Summary

Here is what we have learned about Aristotle's view of motion: a motion—the process of something changing from one state to another—is a certain kind of activity, its active exercise of its ability to be other than it is. Aristotle makes clear that he does not intend this definiens to indicate

the process by which such an ability is realized; that process is just the motion that he means to be defining, not the concept in terms of which he means to define it. Nor, he reminds us, can it indicate the product of that realization: the physical building, for example, that results from an act of building. The realization that he defines a motion to be is in fact an activity—an *energeia*. It is the activity of a subject's being able to be something other than it now is, prior to its having realized that ability by actually having become other than it now is. This activity is the thing's most fully exercising its *ability*, its most actively being *able to be* something qua being able to be it, while not yet actually *being* it. This is what Aristotle means by saying that a motion is the realization of what is able to be, as he puts it, qua able to be; it is the *activity* of being able to be.

CHAPTER 3

Activity and Substance

Here is what we have learned about Aristotle's view of motion: a motion—the process of something changing from one state to another—is a certain kind of activity, its active exercise of its ability to be other than it is. Aristotle makes clear that he does not intend this definiens to indicate the process by which such an ability is realized; that process is just the motion that he means to be defining, not the concept in terms of which he means to define it. Nor, he reminds us, can it indicate the product of that realization: the physical building, for example, that results from an act of building. The realization that he defines a motion to be is in fact an activity—an *energeia*. It is the activity of a subject's being able to be something other than it now is, prior to its having realized that ability by having become other than it now is. This activity is the thing's most fully exercising its ability, its most actively being what it is able to be qua being able to be that, while not yet actually being it. This is what Aristotle means by saying that a motion is the realization of what is able to be, as he puts it, qua able to be; it is the activity of fully being able to be.

1. Being and Becoming

Two related implications of this definition should be clear. The first concerns the relation between becoming and being. Becoming is for Aristotle the active exercise of something's being able to be otherwise. Becoming is therefore not an ontological category separate from being; the analysis that shows motion to be a mode of activity is aimed precisely at explaining the respect in which becoming is a mode of being. But in order to appreciate fully the force of that claim, it is important that in thinking about the analysis we not look to the wrong being. Becoming *x* is of course coming to be *x,* and it may be that the central ontological force of the term points to that being, to the being *x* that is the telos of becoming *x*. But that is not the being here in question; the being in question is the very being of coming to be, the being that is the moving toward that telos.

The second implication concerns the relation between the concepts of *dunamis* and *energeia* and that of change. It is wrong to suppose that the former concepts of *dunamis* and *energeia*—of ability and activity—are conceptually dependent upon the latter concept of change or motion. This is a tempting supposition. Let a *dunamis* be thought of as something's ability to undergo a transformation in which it becomes other than it is. An *energeia* will then be the result of such transformation relative to some prior *dunamis*. Here is how one reader of Aristotle puts it: "the form that supersedes another in a process of change is called the actuality (energeia) of the previous potency (dunamis). Thus matter and form regarded as factors in a process of change become potentiality and actuality (or potency and act)."[1]

We can see from our discussion of Aristotle's definition of motion why this account is mistaken. For motion is defined by Aristotle in terms of a concept of *energeia* as activity, independent of and prior to that of motion. This activity is realized with respect to its correspondent ability not by a change from one characteristic to another, but rather by the active exercise of the ability that was previously inactive, the activity of a dispositional capacity that was present but inoperative; it is a transformation, as we have seen Aristotle put it, "from having but not actively exercising [an ability] to actively exercising it—*ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν μὴ ἐνεργεῖν*

δέ εἰς τὸ ἐνεργεῖν" (*De Anima* 2.5, 417a32–417b1). This prior concept of *dunamis* and *energeia* allows Aristotle to construct the account of motion in terms of activity at which we have just looked: something is in motion when its ability to be other than it is, an ability inoperative when it is at rest, is actively exercised and in operation, that is, when the thing is most fully being able to be other.

This sense of *energeia* as the active exercise of an ability is what Aristotle invokes in the discussion of *Metaphysics* 9.6 with which we began. It is *energeia* in this sense that he there contrasts to motion, even though it explains motion; unlike motion, it is an activity that is its own perfection. And it is, as we will now see, this sense of *energeia,* a sense prior to and independent of the concepts of motion, change, and the family of surrounding notions, that will be harnessed by Aristotle in his analysis of substance.

Notice now this difference between a motion and an activity. Central to the analysis of motion I offered in Chapter 2 is the distinction between the realization of an ability qua ability and the realization of that ability *simpliciter.* My ability to be in Azusa realized qua ability is my traveling there; realized *simpliciter,* it is being there. But for an activity, there is no such difference. The realization of being able to see is seeing, and there is no process by which that realization is accomplished such that we could say: this is the realization of the ability to see qua ability, while the seeing itself is the full realization of the ability. Nor is there an end other than seeing, an end that seeing is essentially designed to bring about and that would reveal seeing to be the realization of an ability qua ability, while that end would be the full realization of the ability. It is for this reason that there is no process by which an activity (whether an activity proper or a motion) comes into being (*De Anima* 2.5, 417b6–9; *Physics* 5.2, 225b15–21). It is furthermore for this reason—indeed, it is this fact—that to see is to have seen.

But to move is not to have moved. In the case of motion, there is always a further end—having moved—which is other than the motion and for the sake of which the motion exists.[2] It is a consequence of this fact that one cannot say that at the same time a builder is building a house and has built that house.

2. Two Modes of Ability Reconsidered

I have reiterated the last several considerations in order to stress a fact that will be important for our understanding of Aristotle's concept of *dunamis.* The ability that we have seen a motion to *be* is consumed in the course of the realization to which that ability is ultimately directed. This is what Aristotle means in the passage we quoted earlier: "The activity of the buildable qua buildable is [the act of] building. For the activity is either this—the act of building—or the house. But when there is a house, it is no longer buildable, whereas it is precisely the buildable that is being built" (*Metaphysics* 11.9, 1066a3; *Physics* 3.1, 201b12). Like time, the ability that is exercised in a motion gets used up in the course of that motion. Thus the buildable becomes no longer buildable; its *buildability* is exhausted in the course of the house being built.

But in the case of an activity, the opposite is true. Here the realization, far from replacing and using up the ability for it, is, as we have seen, the full exercise of that ability. Indeed, in many cases in which Aristotle is interested (such as the development of a virtue or the acquisition of a skill), a realization strengthens and develops its ability (*Nicomachean Ethics* 2.1, 1103a34–1103b5).

We can now understand the meaning of Aristotle's thoughts from *De Anima* 2.5 quoted earlier. In motions, things exchange one state for another and different state, and in so doing surrender an ability in order that the appropriate realization may be achieved. But in the realization of what we have called a dispositional capacity—what Aristotle calls a first level of realization—a capacity has not been replaced by its correspondent realization, for the realization is the capacity in operation; it is the capacity being exercised. No change has taken place, and as a consequence no ability has been destroyed. The ability has in fact been brought into full being.

All of this is brought sharply into focus in the sentence that immediately follows the one I have repeatedly quoted from *De Anima:*

> Neither is "being acted on" used in a single sense. In one sense it means the destruction (*φθορά*) of something by its contrary, while in another it means the preservation (*σωτηρία*) of what is able to be

> something (*δυνάμει ὄντος*) by what is actually being that something (*ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄντος*) and which is like it in the way ability is like actuality. (*De Anima* 2.5, 417b2–5)

This important contrast between cases in which realization involves the destruction of a contrary that is the source of the ability for that realization and those in which it involves the preservation of the ability is another, and for the purposes of the *Metaphysics* perhaps more important, version of the distinction between motion and activity.

These considerations make it possible to understand why, in the face of the distinction between motion and activity, Aristotle nevertheless describes motion as a form of activity. Because a motion for Aristotle is the activity of what is able to be something qua able to be that, it is, in relation to that ability, an instance of the latter kind of activity, activity in which a capacity has been brought into full and active being. Since, however, that very being is incomplete—*ἀτελής*—and is directed toward an end outside itself, motion's preservation of ability qua ability is subversive and can only be temporary. It is for this reason that a motion is said to be an activity, although an incomplete one.

We have explored both differences and similarities between activity and motion in the hope that they might illumine the distinction with which we began, the distinction between two kinds of ability that Aristotle draws at the beginning of Book 9 of the *Metaphysics,* draws but does not fully explain. These two kinds of ability are not distinguished from one another merely objectively, one the ability for one kind of realization and another for another; there is a more intricate difference between them and between the ways in which they are related to their respective modes of realization.

The concept of ability introduced in the opening chapters of Book 9 is, as Aristotle says, the more ordinary concept of something's ability to change or to bring about a change, its ability to undergo or to cause motion in another. Think of this as a principle of the possibility of things' being other than they are and the making real of this possibility: making things other. And think of this as achieved through a process of change in which something's ability to be other than it is, as actively realized in that very process, is consumed in the thing's becoming other.

But the concept of ability to which the discussion in Book 9 points, and which Aristotle describes as more important to the purposes of that book, is concerned not with change and becoming. It is concerned with a feature of things' being what they are: the fact that certain kinds of being are present, paraphrasing the locution we have read in the *De Anima,* now as inactive—*μὴ ἐνεργεῖν*—and now as active—*ἐνεργεῖν* (*De Anima* 2.5, 417a35). This fact is a salient feature of being expressed in the concepts of *dunamis* and *energeia* as capacity and its exercise. Being presents itself sometimes as inoperative and inactive, and sometimes—*without changing*—as operative and active.[3] This is the principle of much of Aristotle's thought, explicitly in the *Metaphysics,* implicitly throughout his work. It is, as we have seen, this sense of *dunamis* and *energeia* as capacity and exercise that Aristotle has in mind when he characterizes motion as a kind of activity and that allows him to define motion as the realization of something's ability to be other than it is without that definition wrongly capturing the motion's result (*Physics* 3.1, 201a10–14; *Metaphysics* 11.9, 1065b16–28). And it is this sense to which he characteristically refers when he mentions the contrast between *dunamis* and *energeia,* as for example in the important uses of this contrast in his explanation of psychic structures in the *De Anima* (*On the Soul* 2.5, 417a22–417b6).

Several examples are standardly used by Aristotle to illustrate this contrast, as in *Metaphysics* 5.7 and in the very passage we have been discussing in *Metaphysics* 9.6. We say both (a) of someone who is sighted but has her eyes shut or is asleep and (b) of someone who is engaged in the activity of seeing something that they *see.* Similarly, we say both (a) of someone who understands something dispositionally—as one might understand the ablaut shift even while asleep—and (b) of someone who is actively exercising such understanding—explaining the shift, for instance, to a friend—that they understand (*Metaphysics* 5.7, 1017b2–5). In both these cases, the relation is between (a) an ability and (b) its active exercise, between (a) a capacity and (b) the realization of that capacity in operation. It is not between one state of affairs and a different state of affairs that it might become.

Since an ability and its exercise are the same being, its exercise indeed constituting an ability's manifest presence and preservation, the rela-

tionship between *dunamis* and *energeia* thus understood is maintained even in the fullest moment of realization. It may be necessary for heuristic purposes to introduce the relationship by reference to the distinction between a sighted person with eyes shut and that person with eyes open, or between a French speaker who is silent and one who is actively speaking French; but a person whose eyes are open still has the ability to see, and a person who is actively engaged in speaking French is still able to speak French. At the moment of exercise, abilities of this sort are indeed most fully realized, called forth into the fullest and most active form of their being. Here realization does not replace ability. It manifests ability and expresses it, and it is, in contrast to the unstable and other-directed expression of ability that defines motion, the occasion for the fullest and most active self-expression of the ability that it is.

3. Abilities and Their Realization

The distinction between two kinds of ability is thus more generally and more importantly a distinction between two kinds of relation that abilities have to their realizations; it is a distinction between two pairs of ability and activity. The discussion in the earlier section of *Metaphysics* 9.6, in which, with frustrating brevity, the second and more important sense of these terms is introduced, makes this point clear and reproduces the distinction as we have seen it emerge. (I have introduced bracketed numbers into Aristotle's presentation, which will momentarily become clear.) Aristotle writes that

> activity *(energeia)* is something's being so (*τὸ ὑπάρχειν τὸ πρᾶγμα*) not in the way we speak of as "in ability" *(dunamei).* We speak of something being so "in ability," when, for example, we speak of [A] Hermes in the wood or the half line in the whole, since they are able to be taken out, or of [B] someone understanding something if he is able to think of it even when he is not thinking of it. What we mean will become clear by inference from particular examples, and we must not look for a definition of each term, but rather grasp the analogy: as [B] that which is building is to that which is able to build, as that which is awake is to that which is asleep, as that which is seeing

> is to that which is not seeing but has sight, as [A] that which has been shaped out of the matter is to the matter, as the worked is to the unworked. Let one member of this antithesis be defined as activity *(energeia)* and the other as what is able (*τὸ δυνατόν*). Then activity is not spoken of in every case in the same sense, but by analogy; as this is in this or is in relation to this, so that is in that or is in relation to that. (*Metaphysics* 9.6, 1048a30–1048b8)[4]

Here we are given precisely the antithesis I have been describing. There are instances of (B) the relationship of an ability to its realization in which the realization is the ability's exercise, an activity that expresses and thus preserves it. In these cases ability and its exercise are formally the same; the latter is merely the former in operation. Imagine this: a carpenter who is taking a nap wakes up (B2), opens his eyes and sees something (the wood in his workshop) (B3), and then begins to exercise his art of building (B1). But to exercise his art of building he will engage in activities in which (A) the relationship of an ability or potentiality to its realization is realized by a process of change in which the realization comes into being as something else signaling the extinction of the ability. So the builder makes some matter into something else: a carpenter builds wood, say, into a lintel (A1), or a mason cuts and shapes an unwrought stone into a finished stone threshold (A2).

Aristotle's actual presentation is chiastic. Examples of ability are (A) Hermes in the wood and the half-line in the whole (both governed by the dividing phrase "since they are able to be taken out") and (B) the knower who, though not thinking of the object of his understanding, has the dispositional ability to exercise that understanding by thinking of it. The examples that reveal activity are (B) actions relative to dispositional capacities—building, being awake, seeing—and (A) results of processes of transformation—the shaped and the wrought.

Notice that in my expansion of Aristotle's leaner examples, *building* does double duty, appearing first as an example of *energeia* and then as an example of change. This is possible because, as we learned in Chapter 2, any motion may be thought of as an activity, and in addition this is true of building if one thinks from the point of view of the builder, not as something's development through stages of change into something else,

but simply as the realization of her art of building: so our previous citation of Aristotle's admonition that it would be "wrong to say that the thinker in thinking undergoes a change, just as it would be wrong to say this of the builder when he builds" (*De Anima* 2.5, 417b8–11).[5]

Aristotle concludes his discussion with a sentence that is clearly meant to summarize the distinction, a sentence that I have claimed is revealing and to which we will return in a moment; activity, he writes, is "in one sense as motion to ability, in another sense as substance to some matter" (*Metaphysics* 9.6, 1048b8–9).

In his commentary on the *Metaphysics,* Alexander of Aphrodisias understands Aristotle to be here making a distinction not between two kinds of activity, but between the results of two different kinds of change. Aristotle's analogy, he writes, should be understood to mean that

> as someone walking is to someone seated, so is Alexander to the menstrual fluid. For someone is said to be walking as a motion in relation to an ability, that is, as one attribute in relation to another, whereas Alexander is in relation to the menstrual fluid as substance to matter; for the menstrual fluid is the matter of a human.[6]

This understanding subverts the force of Aristotle's argument in subtle but damaging ways; the subversion can be seen in Alexander's choice of the menstrual fluid as the matter Aristotle has in mind. For menstrual fluid is, in Aristotle's understanding of reproduction, the matter for the *generation* of a human being. But what Aristotle's argument requires, as we will see, is the proximate matter of the formed and actual human, that is, the human's *living body.* It is this *living body* that is the paradigm for Aristotle of matter in relation to which substance can properly be understood as a form of *activity.*

Alexander understands Aristotle to be distinguishing between two kinds of change, mere change of quality and substantial change, which may indeed be thought not to be a change at all, as it constitutes generation and destruction. But while the distinction between generation and change of quality is an important one for the understanding of substance, it is not the distinction Aristotle here has in mind, and it is not the distinction he has advertised since the beginning of Book 9. That distinction,

as we have seen, is between differently related senses of *dunamis* and *energeia*.

Alexander may have been influenced in his interpretation by Aristotle's description, in the context of a very different argument concerning the several principles we invoke to explain generation, of menses as the *material* cause of a human (*ἀνθρώπου αἰτία ὡς ὕλη*), as semen is the *motive* cause (*αἰτία ὡς κινοῦν*), the cause he elsewhere describes as the principle of generation or of motion (*ἀρχὴ τῆς γενέσεως* or *τῆς κινήσεως*).[7] But the misunderstanding reveals a more general misunderstanding of Aristotle's project. According to this (mis)understanding, Aristotle has completed the analysis of substance by the beginning of Book 9 of the *Metaphysics* and turns at that point to a related but independent discussion of *dunamis* and *energeia*.[8] In fact, however, Aristotle introduces this discussion, and in particular the distinction between two kinds of activity with which we began, as a moment in the argument concerning substance and being that occupies the central books of the *Metaphysics*.

4. The Senses of *Energeia* and the Unity of Substance

At the opening of *Metaphysics* 9, Aristotle outlines the course that his discussion will take:

> First we will discuss ability in its most standard sense (*μάλιστα κυρίως*), even though it is not the most useful sense for what we are now about; for ability and activity are spoken of in more senses than those with respect to motion alone. But when we have talked about that sense, we will then, in the course of discussing activity, explain the others as well. (*Metaphysics* 9.1, 1045b35–1046a2)

This is indeed the course of the argument. After a long and intricate account of ability in the sense Aristotle understands as ordinary or standard, in which he discusses different aspects of the ability to be moved and to move—that is, to change and to effect change in others—as well as related modal concepts, he turns at the beginning of chapter 6, exactly as promised, to the discussion of activity at which we have just looked:

> Now that we have talked about ability with respect to motion, let us say something about activity, explaining both what it is and some of its features. For in the course of our discussion it will at the same time be made clear about ability that we do not ascribe being able only to that which naturally moves something else or is moved by something else, either without qualification or in some special sense, but also use the word in another sense, which is the purpose of the inquiry in which we have discussed these as well. (*Metaphysics* 9.6, 1048a25–30)

The wording of this opening makes clear that Aristotle still has in mind the course of argument announced at the beginning of Book 9; the discussion of activity about to take place will have as one of its central purposes that of revealing another sense of ability or being able, the sense that in the earlier context is said to be *most useful.* But most useful for what? "Most useful," Aristotle tells us in what we have just read, "for what we are now about" (*Metaphysics* 9.1, 1046a1). According to the interpretation of Aristotle's strategy that I have just attributed to Alexander, this phrase—*what we are now about*—must be read to signify a purpose internal to the argument of the book that follows, an independent investigation into the nature of ability and activity.

But by "what we are now about," Aristotle means to refer to a larger context of argument that we are in the midst of, an argument the beginnings of which precede Book 9 and in which that book is a moment. In one sense this larger context is the *Metaphysics* itself, the complex enterprise of revealing the nature of substance and, beyond that, the nature of being as such.

But there is a more immediate project that Aristotle has in mind as "what we are now about," a project that is in the service of the larger task. This project is that of addressing the issue revealed at the end of Chapter 2: the issue of the unity of matter and form in substance. It is this question that the concepts we are considering are explicitly introduced to resolve. Note that the concepts of *energeia* and *dunamis* are first introduced at the beginning of Book 8, immediately after the aporetic ending of Book 7. And note how they are introduced; activity is mentioned for the first time in explication of form: "Substance is, on the one hand,

matter, on the other hand, form, that is, activity—*μορφὴ καὶ ἐνέργεια*" (*Metaphysics* 8.2, 1043a27–28).[9]

The subsequent revised discussion of form throughout Book 8 is linked to this newly introduced notion of *energeia*—activity—and at the end of that book, Aristotle explicitly invokes *dunamis* and *energeia* as solutions to the problem of the unity of matter and form, although he states it in terms of the correspondent problem of the unity of definition to which he has turned by way of analogy toward the end of Book 7.

If we link matter to the concept of *dunamis* and form to that of *energeia,* Aristotle asserts, the unity of subject and being in substance, and the respect therefore in which substance can be understood as in-itself being, will become clear to us. Recall that in an earlier moment of Book 8, speaking of the perplexity concerning the unity of being, Aristotle writes:

> Clearly then, if we go on defining and speaking in this manner, it will be possible neither to get an answer nor to solve our perplexity; but if, as we say, there is on the one hand matter and on the other form, and one has to do with ability and the other with activity (*τὸ μὲν ὕλη τὸ δὲ μορφή, καὶ τὸ μὲν δυνάμει τὸ δὲ ἐνεργείᾳ*), what we are after will no longer be perplexing. (*Metaphysics* 8.6, 1045a23–26)

How are we to understand this answer? In one sense, as we have seen, matter is that out of which something is made or comes to be, that which is transformed into something. The bricks and stones (say) that constitute the material elements of a house are in this sense the matter that is made into the house. In this sense, matter is the *dunamis* that we have seen Aristotle associate with motion and change. Here the fact that bricks and stones *are able to be* a house means that they *can be made into* a house. But it is not in this sense that the matter of substance is associated with *dunamis.* That is the force of Aristotle's claim at 1048b8 that the sense of the term important for the understanding of substance is not the sense relative to motion, but that other, *more important sense,* the structure of which I have attempted to explicate.

In this other sense, the fact that I am, for instance, able to speak French does not mean that I can be made into a French speaker. It means that I can exercise an ability, and the ability and its exercise are one thing: a capacity in operation. So it is with substance. Matter and form are not linked together by possibilities of becoming. They are present together in the being that is nothing other than the active essence—that is, the essential activity—of the one being that both are. It is in this sense that matter is the locus of ability and capacity—*dunamis*—and form, as the principle of that ability's exercise, is the principle of its active being—its *energeia*. Form, we might say, is the principle of matter in operation; in instances of substantial being, it is the operation of the being that is substance.

We were right, then, to have paid attention to what Aristotle writes in chapter 3 of Book 7, where we read that "other [beings] are predicated of substance, substance of matter;" (*Metaphysics* 7.3, 1029a23) but we did not yet have a sense of matter and a sense of what it is to be predicated of matter that allowed us to say this without collapsing substance into the nonbeing of indeterminacy. The proper account of ability and activity provides that sense, by providing the sense in which matter and form are one and the same thing. They are one as body and soul are one: now understood as a locus of ability, now as the principle of that ability's active exercise.

Although matter is said to be a principle of ability and form one of activity, matter should not be thought of as a first level of realization of which form is the further realization, what we have called second realization. In those living beings that emerge in Aristotle's ontology as paradigm instances of substance, it is in fact form—soul in the case of such substances—that is first realization, actualized in the second realization that is the activity of the thing's being what the form determines it to be. How we are to understand this fact, and specifically the relation between first and second levels of realization, is an issue to which we will return later.

The suggestion I have put forward now is only that we may, as we did with motion, allow Aristotle's understanding of first and second levels of realization to figure a more general relationship between capacity and

activity, and then to read these relations as models for the relation between matter and form. Matter is related to form as the eye is to (the power of) sight; but both of these relationships may be understood in terms of the relation between that power and its active exercise in seeing. And just as eye, sight, and seeing are bound together in the complex unity of the healthy organ of sight in operation, so are matter, form, and being bound together in the complex unity of an actual substance: a particular human, for instance, informed body and soul, being human.

5. The Unity of Substance and the Unity of Being

I have urged us to remember that the general question of the *Metaphysics* concerns the nature of being as such; the question concerning substance is raised because answering that question will allow us to answer the question, what is being? I postponed asking how Aristotle thinks this explanatory power of substance operates, but I said that it must be by way of substance's conceptual and not merely ontic priority. For when Aristotle asserts that the categories of being are said in reference to a single sense, which is substance, he means that the diverse modes of being may be understood in terms of what it is for something to be substance. These considerations should convince us that the focus upon substance is not a result simply of Aristotle's conviction that substance is the primary mode of being, but of his conviction that this fact in turn confers upon substance a conceptual and explanatory priority and therefore a power that makes possible understanding being by understanding substance. The details of Aristotle's argument in *Metaphysics* 7.1 make this clear, and connect with something else we have since learned about substance: its association with the mode of being by which something is what it is. For when Aristotle turns in that chapter to justify his claim of substance's priority, he does so by noting that "we think we know each thing most fully, when we know of a human or of fire what it is, rather than its quality or quantity or place, since we know each of these very things also when we know what the quality or the quantity is" (*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028a36–1028b3).

Observe what the argument here is not and what it is. It is not that we know quality, quantity, and the like when we know the substance that is

the subject of these attributes. It is rather that we understand quality, quantity, and the like when we understand what they are. When we understand what they are: this means when we understand them in terms of the *τί ἐστι* being that characterizes substance, the being of things capable of serving as subject. There is the conceptual priority of substance; we understand being in the other categories when we understand the being associated with substance—the *τί ἐστι* being by which something is what it is.

And in *Metaphysics* 7.4 we learn that it is not only being that is said in reference to a single sense—*πρὸς ἓν λεγόμενα*; something's being what it is exhibits the same focal homonymy:

> What something is (*τὸ τί ἐστιν*) signifies in one sense substance and a particular something, but in another each of the ways of being predicated, quantity, quality, and the like. For just as "is" (*τὸ ἔστιν*) belongs to all things, not, however, in the same sense, but to one sort of thing primarily and to others in a secondary and dependent sense, so also "what something is" (*τὸ τί ἐστιν*) belongs unqualifiedly to substance, and to other things in a qualified sense. For even of a quality we might ask what it is, so that quality also is what something is, but not unqualifiedly. (*Metaphysics* 7.4, 1030a18–24)

Everything is what it is, even if only substances are what they are unqualifiedly, and it is ultimately the recognition of this fact that enables the understanding of substance to illuminate the nature of being in general. There is thus a doubly refracted dependence of being on substance; we can understand any predication of the form *S is P* only when we understand *what P is*, but P's being what it is can in turn only be understood as a version of some S's being what it is.

The analysis of substance as *energeia* may suggest an analogy in terms of which to phrase this recognition. As motion is *energeia,* but incomplete, since its fulfillment necessarily involves a being outside itself that represents a complete *energeia,* so being in all the other categorial modes exhibits the being by which something is what it is—the being of substance—but exhibits it incompletely. Just as it is a human that is human, so it is a white color that is white, but nothing is white that is not

also other than white (*Posterior Analytics* 1.22, 83a23–33). For every white color is the color of, or is somehow related predicationally to, a white substance that is what it is.

With this in mind, we may read the preliminary account of being in *Metaphysics* 5.7 (1017a8–23) as revealing a structural epitome of Aristotle's argument. An incidental being, such as Callias's being white, is properly to be understood as a white thing's being white where the white thing is Callias. But a white-thing-qua-white's being white is a case of per se (*καθ' αὑτὸ*) being, for it is the white thing that is white. Or rather, it would be were it not for the fact (revealed in English by the innocuous word *thing*) that we must refer our understanding of this being to the human being, that is, to the individual's being human—the individual in this case being Callias. And here there is no such separation, no reference beyond to an underlying subject; for the thing that is human is nothing other than a human being, nothing other, that is, than the human Callias busy actually being human.

The central elements of substance with which we began are thus accounted for: being as subject and being as the being of a subject. But the analysis of *energeia* has revealed that in the case of substance these are one. More generally, what has been revealed to us is that the relation of subject to attributive being is dependent upon a prior structure of per se being—being by virtue of itself. Platonic participation—*μέθεξις*—is thus shown not to be the primary mode of being. Platonists, of course, readily agree that this is true, but argue that this fact means precisely that being is to be located primarily in the forms.

It may be that in his early ontology, Aristotle held to the obvious alternative, claiming that participation is the primary form of being, the predicating one thing of another—*τὶ κατὰ τινός*. The possibility of such predication depends on the existence of substances that are paradigm subjects by virtue of their essential determination. In the *Metaphysics* this latter view, the dialectical mutual dependence of substance as a *this* and as a *what,* is never given up. But as there emerges a more subtle understanding of how these features are united in substance, a richer alternative concerning being in general presents itself: it is this alternative that I have in mind when I speak of *the activity of being.*

The argument I have been elaborating has been confined to the central books of the *Metaphysics,* but it should be clear that recognizing the centrality of activity in the argument of these books will help to understand the role that the being of divine substance is meant to play in the analysis of substance and thus of being in general. For the divine being of *Metaphysics* 12 is, as Aristotle puts it, "a principle whose substance is activity (*δεῖ ἄρα εἶναι ἀρχὴν τοιαύτην ἧς ἡ οὐσία ἐνέργεια*)" (*Metaphysics* 12.6, 1071b20). Whose *ousia* is nothing but *energeia:* the divine has activity as its essential nature, and therefore what it is—its essential being—is the very principle of being itself. I mean by this not that the divine is according to Aristotle the source of existence, but that it is the principle of being, the principle, that is, of things being what they are.

Aristotle, therefore (to indulge in a moment of fantasy), would have predicted that if a philosopher were to be addressed by a god with the words *I am* (as Moses was addressed), and if the philosopher were to ask (reasonably, much as Moses did ask), "You are what?" the response would be (much as it was to Moses), "Being what I am is what I am; whatever I am you can count on my being that." He would, in other words, have been brought to understand the divine being's self-description not as "I am who am," but as "I am what I am." And Aristotle might add: "And that is the god's nature, to be what it is."[10]

When I say of a particular human being, Stein, for example, that he is busy at work being human, I specify his substance in terms of the activity that we can identify as being human—*τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*; this, after all, is what it is to be at work being human. The specification of being a human—elaborating the details, as it were, of *τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*—is the task of biology or of some form of philosophical anthropology. But when, in a more formal ontological mood, I explain that Stein is at work being what he is, I specify his substance in terms of the more formal concept of something's being what it is—*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*—the general principle of which, as we will see, is simply activity. In doing so I link Stein as substance to the divine, and as paronymously (godly and godish) like the divine in being, unmoved and active.

Only, of course, paronymously; for no matter what he does, Stein only approximates that divine form of being which is at work being itself, and

no matter how busy he stays at being human, Stein, like all of us, tires, flags, and eventually will die. For it is the same principle of embodiment by virtue of which sensible substance is movable and by virtue of which it is capable of collapsing into mere ability, falling asleep, and in an extreme form (so extreme as to be radically a different kind of collapse) dying, disappearing, as we say, from being. For a principal form of being able as such for Aristotle is being able to be and not to be, and this is above all manifest in what can come to be and pass away (*On Generation and Corruption* 2.8, 335a34–5).

None of this is surprising in a thinker whose distinction between sensible and separate substance has its origins in a tradition that distinguishes between mortals—*βροτοί*—and immortals—*ἄμβροτοι*—those beings whose very food is immortality—*ἀμβροσία*—beings who, by their constant quiet busyness, are deathless to the core. The best in our life may be to approximate that being in the ways Aristotle allows; but if so, this is because the approximation of divine being is in some important sense the manifestation of our essential being as human animals. I will return to the divine, particularly in Chapter 8, and look in greater detail at Aristotle's discussion of divine being and its relation to substance. But first it will be useful for us to think more about the relation of what I have argued to the being of animals.

CHAPTER 4

The Activity of Living Being

1. Animals, Artifacts, and Accidental Beings

At the beginning of Chapter 1, I wrote that Aristotle's concern is less with substances than with the being of substance. I meant that Aristotle is less interested in the identification of a class of things that can be said to be the primary entities of the world than he is in the proper understanding of the being by virtue of which whatever things we commonly understand to be substantial are so. But of course it is only by thinking about such things as are commonly said to be substantial that we can hope to achieve such an understanding. Among the things that Aristotle sees as commonly (and therefore correctly) understood to exemplify substance, animals—living beings—clearly occupy a central place. They are, on his view, paradigm instances of substance, and those features that first philosophy reveals as characteristic of the being of substance should therefore be evident in the being of animals.[1]

It is an interesting question whether Aristotle began with that conviction and shaped his ontology in light of it, or arrived at it as a result of what his ontology revealed the nature of substance to be. That question in turn might be related to our views about when and with what attitude he undertook his biological work. But whatever we decide is right

concerning these historical matters, our answers will have to take account of his clear conviction that natural living things are, as he puts it, "preeminently substances—*μάλιστα οὐσίαι*" (*Metaphysics* 7.7, 1032a19; 7.8, 1034a4).[2] What will it mean to find the most important features of substance exemplified in living beings? And how will the being of animals (understood most broadly as living things) relate as substance to the notions of ability and activity that we have been thinking about?

Also in Chapter 1, I explored the difference between substance and accidental being. An accidental being—a horse's being gray, for example, or someone's being in Anaheim—is relative to a substratum that is what it is independently of constituting the substratum of that being. The horse that is gray is a horse independent of being gray, and the human who is in Anaheim is a human prior to and independently of being in that location, and remains a human whether or not he is actively there. But the being of substance is not thus relative to an independent substratum. For substance, unlike being in Anaheim, is not said of something that enjoys an independent being prior to constituting or being made into a substance. Substance, in other words, is not said of anything as of an independent subject. There is no substratum that is at work being a human that is independent of the human that it is being.

This difference is not, as I said earlier, to be confused with the distinction between substance and the other categories of being—quantity, quality, position, and the like. It is a difference between the being of substance and the accidental being exemplified in a horse's being gray or in a human's being five feet tall or being in Anaheim: the being, in other words, of *a gray horse* or *a five-foot human* or *a resident of Anaheim*.

Or of a bronze statue or of a house or of the threshold we discussed in the middle of Chapter 1: for note how, returning to that threshold, we may reenter the discussion by stating the difference between substance and accidental being in terms of matter and form. In the case of a human being, there is nothing that is human that is what it is independently of being human. For the body of a human is itself the human. Because substance, in other words, is precisely what it is in itself—is an instance of per se or *καθ'αὐτὸ* being—it exhibits no distinction between material and formal being; there is no separation between what is a substance and what a substance is. In the case of an accidental being such as a thresh-

old, on the other hand, there is such a difference; it is the difference between that which is a threshold (a wooden beam, say) and what the threshold is (its functional position, say, in a doorway). A wooden beam that is a threshold, therefore, can be moved and still remain what it is qua wooden beam. It therefore has a being (being a wooden beam) independent of being a threshold. The matter of a threshold, in other words, is something other than a threshold, and it is that something that is the matter relative to the form *lying in such and such a position as such and such a functional part of a house* that makes it a threshold. And that is why a wooden threshold is an instance of accidental being.

It should be clear that when I say that such an entity is an *instance of accidental being* I do not mean to suggest that its matter and form somehow came together by accident. In the case of artifacts, this is clearly false; artifacts are works of art, and there was clearly an artisan who fashioned with skill and intention the wood of a threshold into a threshold, or the statue's bronze into a statue. But that fact is correlative to the argument I am here making; it is precisely because a wooden threshold is what it is, not by virtue of itself but by virtue of an artificial fashioning that requires the skill and intention of an artisan, that such an entity is an *instance of accidental being* in the technical sense I have witnessed. The wood of a threshold does not by nature form a threshold, even though by nature it is receptive to being so formed.

When we understand the contrast between in itself and accidental being in this way, we will be able to recognize that a threshold and a house and a statue are in a class with such clear examples of accidental being as a horse's being gray or a horse's being in the field. This is not an obvious grouping, nor is the contrast of things like thresholds and houses with things like horses and humans an obvious one. We are familiar with ontological arguments that recommend distinguishing horses, dogs, humans, and other such self-subsistent, independent, and identifiable individuals from sounds, locations, colors, and the like, thought to be parasitic and dependent for their being and individuality upon entities of the first class.[3] But the distinction we are here considering is between two classes of entity, both of which we would normally suppose to be in the first category I mentioned: independent, self-subsistent, and so on. Tables, chairs, houses, statues, thresholds, and books seem to be no less

"substantial individuals," no less subsistent and independent in their (admittedly less complex) being than are horses, hounds, hawks, and humans.

So it is, as I suggested earlier, that we so often focus our reading of the *Metaphysics* on the arguments for the distinction between substance and the other categories of being, categories that we think of as accidental in relation to substance. It is (at least relatively) easy to see the considerations that lead to Aristotle's doctrine of the categories; it is more difficult to understand how the categorical distinction between substance and quality, quantity, place, and so on might lead to distinguishing between humans and thresholds, or between horses and houses.

But consider what a threshold is: it is a wooden beam (for example, or a stone) that is in a certain position in a house. Its being—a wooden beam being in a certain position as such and such a functional part of a house—is therefore an exact analogue of the being of a gray horse—a horse being gray. And just as a gray horse, under that description, is not a substance, so a threshold, as a thus-and-so-positioned wooden beam, is not a substance.

If our thinking is guided by an ontology that recognizes no significant differences among beings that are numerically identical, that is, instantiated in one and the same spatio-temporal individual, this fact will be hard to see even in the case of gray horses. For since, in the case of a particular gray horse—Lady Suffolk, for example—the horse and the gray horse are one and the same individual, it may appear that if one is a substance, the other must be a substance as well. In this way we will be led to think of gray horses as substances, as though *substance* were a category of things rather than a category of the beings of things.[4]

But this is not Aristotle's view. His view—indeed we may think of it as one of the cornerstones of his ontology—is that numerical identity does not entail equivalence of being. Thus two descriptions, A and B, can refer to one and the same individual thing and yet designate different beings: being A—*τὸ* A *εἶναι*—different from being B—*τὸ* B *εἶναι*. They are the same in number, as Aristotle often puts it, but different in being. So although a gray horse is a horse, and in any particular case, the two are identical, the being of a gray horse and the being of a horse are not the same. And because substance is a category of being, it is possible that

the latter is an instance of substance while the former is not; and this is indeed the case.

An important argument at the heart of the *Metaphysics* (intended for other but related purposes) reveals these distinctions with clarity. In *Metaphysics* 7.6 (1031a19–28), Aristotle argues that in the case of accidental beings—things said to be what they are *κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς*—a thing is different from being that thing. A white human, for example, is different from being a white human. Aristotle's argument is fairly straightforward, although it is given in two versions, the second (1031a24–28) in response to an eristic objection to the first. If, Aristotle argues, a white human were the same as being a white human, then it would follow that being a human (or in the second version of the argument being an educated human) would be the same as being a white human. For since a white human is, in the case, say, of Abrams, the same individual as a human (or as an educated human), then if that individual is thought to be identical with being whatever beings he is said to be, all those beings would be identical with one another.

Aristotle thus invokes the unity of an individual thing that exhibits different beings under different descriptions—an individual simple in its singularity but complex in its being—and argues that if we were to suppose something to be the same as any or all of these different beings, then they would be reduced to one identical being. The argument shows, in other words, that the distinction between the unity of an individual thing and the plurality of its different beings would be undermined if we were to assume the identity of an individual and its being in each case.

Aristotle's argument relies upon a fact central to his ontology, the fact that any single individual may be introduced under a plurality of descriptions, each of which determines one of a plurality of different beings. If we lose sight of this fact, the concept of being will be, as it were, deformed. We might even say hyperbolically that being itself will be lost, for we will be unable to account for our ability to identify and to distinguish among the different beings of a single individual. If, Aristotle's argument here reveals, something is identical with each of its beings, then if the thing is one, the beings must be one, or if the beings are many, there will be many things. In either case we will be unable to maintain the distinction between and compossibility of the unity and singularity

of an individual thing and the diversity and plurality of its several beings. But in fact, that which is in Anaheim and is pale and is short and is thinking and is educated is none other than the one single individual subject Abrams.

So the expressions *horse* and *gray horse,* although they denote one and the same thing, determine, as differing descriptions of that thing, two different beings. The horse and the gray horse are one and the same individual—*ἑν ἀριθμῷ* or *ἓν καὶ μία ταὐτόν* as Aristotle phrases it in several different contexts—but their being is not the same—*τὸ δ' εἶναι ἕτερον*.[5] Note that in the case of a thing like a gray horse, a substance (in this case the horse) is in a sense the matter of a nonsubstance (in this case the gray horse). For a gray horse is a horse formally qualified in such and such a way, that is, by being gray. Similarly, if a wooden beam were a substance, a threshold would be a nonsubstance whose matter was, in this same sense, a substance. And although a wooden beam may not be a substance, its matter, the wood, may be; and if we feel uncomfortable about saying this because the wood is dead, the elements that we will eventually reach in an iterative material analysis are, for reasons I will suggest in a moment, substances.

Thinking this way may help us understand the initial plausibility of the view that being in general has substance as its matter, and thus the plausibility of the view that the proper analysis of substance reveals it to be substratum or matter. It might, in other words, help us understand the plausibility of the arguments that are given consideration in *Metaphysics* 7.3, the arguments identifying substance with substratum and matter. But once we are clear that on Aristotle's view a gray horse is not, qua gray horse, a substance, we will be able to recognize that the independence and self-subsistence that characterize thresholds, houses, or statues (in contrast to such things as colors, sounds, or locations) is not sufficient to constitute them as substances in Aristotle's ontology. Substances are not simply things.

The use of artifacts in the *Metaphysics* in the consideration of substance might lead us to forget this fact, and to forget that thresholds, beds, houses, and statues are more appropriately to be classified with gray horses than with horses. For Aristotle's heuristic use of artifacts sometimes makes it appear that he counts as substances statues as well

as animals, and bronze spheres as well as the more divine celestial spheres. But this appearance is misleading, and such things are not, for Aristotle, instances of substance in any unqualified sense. They are introduced into the discussion of the *Metaphysics* not as examples of substance, but as things whose material and formal principles are more clearly visible precisely because they are nonsubstantial beings, and therefore beings in which the principles of matter and form are independent of one another and separable. It is for a similar reason that Aristotle's typology of causes—the famous doctrine of the four causes—is elaborated with an etiology of artifacts in mind; but these artifacts are not instances of substance.[6]

2. Matter and Form in Artifacts

Gray horses, then, are accidental beings, and so are thresholds and houses. We can see this from their ontological structure: a horse is gray, a wooden beam is placed beneath a door, a structure of wood and stone serves as a residence. Note here that gray horses, thresholds, and houses, insofar as they are composite wholes, are not in any single category of predicative being. For what they are qua subject—what the predicative being is said of—may be in one category, while the predicate—what is said of the subject and constitutes the formal principle by virtue of which it is specifically that being—may be in another. Horse, wooden beam, and structure of wood and stone are in categories other than those of gray, placed beneath a door, and serving as a residence. This is part of what it means for them to be accidental beings (or accidental unities), and it is also why, as accidental beings, they do not, strictly speaking, have an essence: "each of these predicates, when either it is said of itself, or when its genus is said of it, signifies what it is (*τί ἐστι σημαίνει*). But when it is said of something other, it does not signify what it is, but how much or of what sort, or one of the other categories" (*Topics* 1.9, 103b35–38).

Although the entire entity defined by an instance of accidental being is thus not in any single category of predication, the predicate itself may be. The predicate of a horse being gray or of a wooden beam being a threshold, and therefore the formal principle of being what it is for such

a thing as a gray horse or a threshold, may be in a single category, but it is a category other than substance.

This fact is obvious in many cases of nonsubstantial being immediately predicated of a substance: a horse, for example, being gray or being in the field. For in each of these cases the form by virtue of which the substance is qualified—its color or position in a field—is obviously in one of the categories other than substance: here quality or location. But this is no less true, though perhaps less obvious, in the case of things like our threshold. For a threshold, as the description in *Metaphysics* 8.2 makes clear, is something whose being is in part in the category of location, since it is being in a certain functional position that, among other things, makes a wooden beam a threshold. Breakfast, analogously, is determined as breakfast by a mode of being in the category of time, for it is by virtue of being eaten (or served) at a certain time that a selection of food constitutes breakfast rather than dinner. The north wind, to use another of Aristotle's examples, has its being in the category of location. And in general the predicates by which such accidental beings are determined in their being are in one or another of the categories other than substance (*Metaphysics* 8.2, 1042b15–25).

These two facts about an instance of accidental being—that it spans, as it were, more than one category of being, and that the form that defines it in its being is in a category other than substance—are obviously related. For since the ultimate subjects of predication are substances, predications in other categories of being will eventually reveal themselves to be instances of nonsubstance predicated of an instance of substance. The situation is more complicated with more complex and highly structured entities such as beds or houses or statues, for here the proximate matter may more easily be understood as related in itself to the form. But, as we will see, there is eventually a matter that is not by virtue of itself a bed or what is a bed. It is that matter, as Aristotle remembers Antiphon to have whimsically argued, that would sprout if one were to plant a bed, a fact that shows that the arrangement by virtue of which such matter constitutes a bed is an attribute accidental to it (*Physics* 2.1, 193a12–15).

I mean here to be making a general remark about the role that Aristotle understands matter or substratum to play relative to form or being. That role, I am arguing, is different in the accidental being that characterizes

things like thresholds and houses and in the substantial being that characterizes things like horses and humans. But it may not be immediately clear that there is any such distinction between the two cases with respect to the relation of matter and form. Of course there is a difference of being in the two cases, a difference, for example, between being a threshold and being a horse. But is it clear that there is a further difference between the cases in respect to the relation of subject to being, of subject to the principle by virtue of which it is whatever it is? Why, in other words, suppose there is a difference between (a) the relation of the wooden beam that is the threshold to its being a threshold, or to the principle by virtue of which it constitutes a threshold and (b) the relation of the body that is a horse to its being a horse, or to the principle by virtue of which it constitutes a horse?

To answer this question and to explain why I recommend this difference, I want to engage in a small exercise. I want to imagine our asking a series of questions concerning (1) things like thresholds and houses, which I have argued are instances of Aristotelian accidental being, and (2) animals, which are instances of substance. The questions will inquire after the nature of (A) matter and (B) form for each of these classes of being.

So first about thresholds (and their ilk). Begin with what we may call the simple material question:

(1A) What is the matter of a threshold?

The answer to this question is relatively straightforward: the matter of a threshold is (for example) a wooden beam (or a stone) that, by being placed beneath the door, is made into the door's sill. Notice the relation of this answer to two features of our earlier discussion of matter in Chapter 1. Recall first the distinction we drew between the matter out of which something is made and the matter of which it consists; wooden beam is an answer both to the genetic question concerning a threshold, what is it made out of? and to the constitutive question, what is it made up of? The two questions determine a single answer. For a wooden beam is not simply that out of which a threshold is made, but also that of which it is composed or of which it consists; it is that which is at work being a threshold. Recall further that the wooden beam is something that serves

as the matter of a threshold. Qua wooden beam it is a determinate being in its own right (with its own material principle); insofar as it is considered the matter of a threshold, it loses that determinate being and comes to be thought of as indeterminate relative to another being, that of the threshold.

Consider next the *formal question:*

(1B) What is the form of a threshold?

A threshold consists of or is made out of a wooden beam. There is some formal principle by virtue of which that wooden beam constitutes specifically or is made specifically into a threshold and not, for example, a lintel or roof-beam. This question asks, what is that formal principle? It asks, in other words, what it is for a wooden beam (for example) to be a threshold. Asking the question this way reminds us that form for Aristotle is always specific to a thing under a particular description, that is, qua a certain being. Every instance of being determines a form, and determines a form relative to its description as that being. Any particular individual thing, as subject to many different (true) descriptions, is the subject of many different beings, and so will have as many forms, each form relative to the thing under that description, or as we say in an older idiom, qua that being.

To ask about the form of a threshold is clearly to ask about its form qua threshold, that is, insofar as it is a threshold, and not qua any of the other beings of which a threshold might be subject: made out of a wooden beam, part of an obscure marriage ritual, a particularly fine example of regional carpentry, and so on. This is why to ask about the form of a threshold in this sense is to ask, what is it for something to be a threshold, or as we might ask of a particular threshold, what is it for this thing to be a threshold?

The simplest Aristotelian answer to the formal question, what is it to be a threshold? is also the most trivial: being a threshold.[7] Only slightly less trivial is this answer: to be a threshold is to be doing what a threshold does. It is, in other words, to be performing a *liminal function.* It is important in understanding the use here of the word *function* to keep in mind that a thing's function is its characteristic or proper activity. Sometimes

functions are thought of instrumentally, in connection with the concept of purpose. But it is only instrumental things that have instrumental functions; beings that are not instrumental have functions that are not instrumental. In general, the function of some A, translating Aristotle's *ἔργον*, is what the thing does qua characteristically being A. To be a threshold is thus to be doing the work—the *ergon* (*ἔργον*)—characteristic of a threshold, and therefore being at work—*energos* (*ἐνεργὸς*)—as a threshold. It is, in other words, being actively—*energeia* (*ἐνεργείᾳ*)—a threshold.

The specification of what constitutes this liminal function is the subject matter not of philosophy, but of *limenology,* what we might think of as the science of thresholds. I use the term *science* in a very generous sense to include the thought of ordinary people and experts alike about what thresholds are, how they operate, what they are made of and best made of, how they are installed and best installed, and so on. Limenologists, if we may call them that, consider and use and refine the formula for being a threshold—*τὸ οὐδῷ εἶναι*—which formula will, as we have seen, include some reference to the position in a house of the thing constituting the threshold. For the function or characteristic activity of a threshold and therefore the form by virtue of which that thing is a threshold includes, among other things, *being in a certain position in a house* (namely, beneath a door at a house's entrance). Suppose we call that formula the *liminal logos,* as it is the formula of a threshold. We can then use it to specify the formal account of a threshold: being a threshold is to be actively—*energeia*—what is specified in the liminal logos.

Imagine now this further exercise: suppose we ask about the matter of thresholds the questions that we have been asking about thresholds. So ask (postponing for a moment an iterative material question) the same formal question that we asked about the threshold, but now about the threshold's matter. Suppose, in other words, that we ask:

(1Ab) What is it to be the matter of a threshold?

This question is ambiguous for reasons we have just noted. Because the concept of form is relative to a thing qua some particular being, in asking what it is to be the matter of a threshold we might be asking either of two different questions. We might be asking:

> (1Ab1) What is it to be a wooden beam (assuming that is what the matter of some threshold is)?

Here we mean to be asking, what is the formal account of that out of which a threshold is made, not qua the matter of a threshold, but qua what the thing (in this instance a wooden beam) is, independent of that further feature of its being?

Here we are thinking of the wooden beam simply qua wooden beam. For whatever makes up a threshold or out of which a threshold is made, independent of thus being the threshold's proximate matter, is also whatever it is, so to speak, in its own right. It will therefore have a form that determines it simply as that being that it is in its own right. So we may be asking the formal question with respect to that very being, asking about the formal nature of the matter not as such but simply qua wooden beam which, as it happens, is the matter of the threshold.

The answer to this question will specify whatever may be thought to be a reasonable formal account of a wooden beam. Such an account might, for example, specify first what it is to be a beam, and then what it is for a beam to be made out of wood, or it might straightaway specify what it is to be a transformed part of, say, an oak tree. And it will then specify that one of the accidental features of such a beam is being the matter of a threshold.

But we may also be asking the question considering the wooden beam expressly as the threshold's matter, and attempting to specify its formal nature as such, that is, qua matter. Then our question will be:

> (1Ab2) What is it to be (in this case) a wooden beam qua matter-of-a-threshold?

This is to ask, what is the form of the matter insofar as it is thought of not as a wooden beam, but as something out of which a threshold is made, or that is serving as a threshold, or that is at work being a threshold?

The answers to these two questions will be different; the formal account appropriate for a wooden beam qua wooden beam is not the same as the formal account that will be appropriate for a wooden beam qua matter. For the one account—that of the wooden beam qua wooden beam—will not refer essentially to a threshold, while the other—that of

the wooden beam qua matter—will. When we consider that which is the matter of a threshold, in other words, two different beings emerge. It is one thing to be simply a wooden beam and another to be the matter of a threshold, even though it is just the wooden beam that is the matter of the threshold.

This material doubleness is specifically a feature of accidental being, and here it is simply another face of the fact that a threshold is an instance of such accidental being. For consider what has been revealed: that which is a threshold (the oak beam) is not in itself a threshold. It is an oak beam that (as we say) just happens to be a threshold. And this is to say that it is accidentally one. An accidental being, in other words, is an instance of something being predicated of a subject that is in itself independent of and other than the predicated being.

This feature of accidental being contrasts with the being of substance. For a substance exhibits the same being in both its subject and predicate. Aristotle makes this point and the resulting contrast clear in an aside in the *Posterior Analytics:*

> Expressions that signify substance signify that either the predicate or some particular form of the predicate is just what that of which it is predicated is. Those that do not signify substance, but are said of a different underlying subject (*κατ' ἄλλου ὑποκειμένου*), so that neither the predicate nor any particular form of the predicate is just what it is, are accidental, as for example, white predicated of human. Neither white nor any particular form of white is just what a human is. Animal, however, is; a particular form of animal is just what a human being is. Expressions that do not signify substance must be predicated of some underlying subject; nothing is white that is not some other thing that is being white. (*Posterior Analytics* 1.22, 83a24–33)

So a wooden beam is not per se a threshold; it is a threshold not by virtue of itself, but by virtue of being in a certain position, and being in a certain position is not part of being a wooden beam. Indeed, as we noted, to consider a wooden beam as a threshold is already in a sense no longer to consider it as a wooden beam, but rather as, so to speak, a

wooden-beamy something in-a-certain-position. It is for this very reason that things like thresholds are said not to be wood, but wooden (*Metaphysics* 7.7, 1033a5–7; 9.7, 1049a19–24).

We may think our way back into the nature of living beings by noting how different in this respect thresholds are from horses. A threshold is wooden because it is made out of wood. But an oak tree is not in this sense wooden, for it is not made out of wood; nor could a horse be said in this sense to be bodily, for it is also not made out of a body. A horse just is a body—a living body. This fact will become clearer if we turn our attention back to animals, and ask about a horse—our specimen living being—the same series of questions we have just asked about a threshold.

3. Matter and Form in Animals

Once again, ask first what we called the material question:

(2A) What is the matter of a horse?

Once again, the answer seems relatively straightforward: the matter of a horse is the horse's body. For it is the body of a living being that appears throughout Aristotle's discussions of the *De Anima* as matter relative to psychic form. The body, he writes at the beginning of the discussion in Book 2, is not to be thought of "as something predicated of a subject, but rather as itself a subject, that is, matter (*ὑποκείμενον καὶ ὕλη*)" (*De Anima* 2.1, 412a19).

Note, however, the difference between this answer and the answer we gave concerning a threshold's matter. For while the horse's body is an appropriate answer to the constitutive question, what is the matter that constitutes a horse or of which a horse consists? it is an inappropriate answer to the genetic question, what is a horse made out of, or what does it come to be out of? Such a question invites an answer in terms of ex quo matter, and it would be a mistake to say that a horse is made out of its body, or that it is generated from its body. The body of a horse constitutes the horse as its proximate matter, but it is not something that in any way becomes or gets made into a horse.

It is for this reason that Aristotle sometimes describes not the body but the menses as an animal's matter (*Generation of Animals* 1.19, 727b31; *Metaphysics* 8.4, 1044a35).[8] Here he clearly must mean matter for generation—the ex quo matter out of which an animal comes to be—and not the matter that the animal is in any constitutive sense. For if there is a sense in which the menses is the matter of an animal and in which an animal may be said to be made out of menses, it is not one in which the animal would be said to be, if there were such a sense of the word, *mensual,* any more than we should want to say, given a contemporary understanding of generation, that it is *eggy.* An animal does not bear the same relationship to the menses that is its matter as it does to the body that is its matter. So in the case of animals, unlike that of artifacts, the two different senses of matter lead to two different answers to the material question.[9]

Let us now turn to what I called the formal question, specifying as above that we mean to be asking about the form and definition of a horse qua horse, and not qua any of the accidental beings the horse might happen to be: gray, in the field, worth a kingdom, and so on. In other words, when we ask, (2B) what is the form of a horse? we mean to be asking, what is it for that which is a horse to be a horse?

Again the simplest answer is, to be a horse. Nor is this as empty as it might sound. What it is for an animal to be a horse is to be acting as horses characteristically act. This means to be performing the typical activities that make up a horse's proper ἔργον, the work—or function in the careful sense I earlier noted—in which it engages in leading its hippic life. So we can say: it is being at work *(energos)* as a horse, or being actively *(energeia)* a horse. The details of this activity are indicated by what we might call the formula for being a horse (τὸ ἵππῳ εἶναι). If we again call this formula the hippologos—again the object of the science of hippology—then being a horse is to be actively—*energeia*—what is specified in the hippologos.

Earlier we noted that the active being in terms of which animals are defined is capable of further discrimination into levels of realization. This fact that the soul is itself a principle of power relative to the more complete functional realization of active living will necessitate a greater complexity in our account of being a horse in relation to the being of substance. But it will not affect the structure of analysis I have here

suggested, as both soul and the activities of living that constitute its realization are forms of activity; this is a point to which we will have occasion to return.

Suppose now that we ask once again the formal question that we asked about the horse itself, but now about the matter of the horse: (2Ab) what is it to be the matter of a horse? Note here that as there are two different things that may be said to be the matter of a horse, depending upon whether we are speaking of genetic or of constitutive matter, there are two different matters concerning which we need to inquire. It is one thing to ask, what is it to be the body of a horse? It is another to ask, what is it to be what grows into a horse? For now, I suggest that we focus on questions concerning constitutive matter, that is, questions concerning the horse's body.

We said that as the matter of something is also what it is in its own right, matter will have a form that determines it not specifically as matter, but as the being that is the matter. Suppose then we ask first, as we did earlier, the formal question with respect to this being, analogous to asking in the earlier case what it is to be a wooden beam:

(2Ab1) What is it to be a horse's body?

That is to ask, what is the formal account of being the body of a horse?

The answer to this question is revealing and important. On Aristotle's view, the body of a horse is the instrument by virtue of which a horse is able to do what it does in the acting out of its function. It is, in other words the organ for the active living of an equine life. An animal body, according to this view, is a being whose formal account necessarily involves reference to some object for which it is the instrument, as a musical instrument is for making music. This object is what Aristotle terms a final cause—a *οὗ ἕνεκα*—the end that the instrument is for the sake of. A body, therefore, is essentially for the sake of something else, as its very being is to be an *ὄργανον*—an instrument for accomplishing the activity that is an animal's life.

The essential instrumentality of an animal body is made explicit in Aristotle's repeated descriptions of such a body as the instrument or organ of an animal's life. "The body," Aristotle writes at the beginning of

the *Parts of Animals,* "is an instrument (*ὄργανον*); for just as each of its parts is for the sake of something, so with the body as a whole" (*Parts of Animals* 1.1, 642a11). In his discussion of the soul, he offers, relative to the soul as principle of the activity of living beings, this account of the body: "all natural bodies are instruments (*ὄργανα*) of soul" (*De Anima* 2.4, 415b18).[10] This point is yet again made clear when, having given a definition of soul in the *De Anima* as the "first realization of a natural body able to have life (*δυνάμει ζωὴν ἔχοντος*)," he immediately goes on to remark that "a body of this sort is one that is instrumental (*ὃ ἂν ᾖ ὀργανικόν*)" (*De Anima* 2.1, 412a28). Several lines later, he defines the soul as "the first realization of a natural instrumental body (*σώματος ὀργανικοῦ*)" (*De Anima* 2.1, 412b5).

It has been common, at least since Alexander, to understand the term *ὀργανικόν* here to mean having parts that are organs.[11] But this is a strained reading of the term that suggests for it a meaning nowhere else to be found in the corpus. Aristotle commonly refers to parts themselves as *ὀργανικόν* and means by this simply that they are instrumental in nature.[12] So it is with the body as a whole. Indeed a body does not have parts that are organs as does the organism of which it is the body. A body simply is an organ and may be said to consist of organs only as a machine may consist of smaller machines. To suppose otherwise would be like supposing that the shadow of my hand was my shadow's hand rather than just my hand's shadow. The body of a living being considered as such is, as it were, the organ of its life. It is an instrument whose nature is to be for the sake of the activity that is the animal's life.

Note the connection that Aristotle here makes between the body as what is able to exhibit life—*δυνάμει ζωὴν ἔχοντος*—and as an instrument—an *ὄργανον*. It is this connection that allows for the functional equivalence of the two definitions of soul, one as the realization of a body able to be alive, the other as the realization of an instrumental body. To think of a horse's body as formally defined in terms of its instrumentality is therefore to think of it in terms of its ability—its *dunamis*—for the activity specified in the formal account of a horse. So to be a horse's body is to be able to do what is involved in being a horse. It is to be an organ that enables the activity of being a horse, an instrument for the complex activity specified in the formal account of being a horse.

The sense of *dunamis* invoked in thus defining a horse's body in terms of an ability to be a horse, that is, to do what is involved in living a horse's life, is the sense we have seen described as more important for the understanding of substance. It is the sense in which to say that something is able to be A does not mean that it is able to become A or to change into A. It is A, even though this being may be (but need not be) revealed only as latent capacity. For the body that is able to be alive is not something that can become alive. It is something that is alive, but qua *dunamis:* considered, that is, as a matrix of power or ability. Even if we envision the possibility of the resurrection of the dead, a corpse does not count as the body Aristotle has in mind. A corpse is not, contra our fashion of speaking, a body in this sense at all, but merely the remains of a body, that is to say, the remains of an animal. Aristotle states this explicitly in the *De Anima,* "it is not that which has lost its soul that is enabled so as to live, but that which has it" (*De Anima* 2.1, 412b25–26). The body, in other words, is always constitutive matter, never matter ex quo. Animals are not made *out* of their bodies.[13]

If we now turn to ask (2Ab2) the formal question concerning the body of a horse not qua what it is in its own right but expressly qua matter-of-a-horse, we will notice something interesting that has emerged from our discussion. For the formal account of a horse's body qua matter is no different from the formal account of a horse's body qua what it is in its own right. The latter account has emerged as precisely an account of the horse's body qua constitutive matter. To be a horse's body, it turns out, is nothing else than to be the matter of a horse.

4. The Matter of Animals and Artifacts

These questions about the form and matter of *animals* and their relation to the form and matter of artifacts have revealed a number of things. In the rest of this chapter, I am going to consider these points further, but specifically in relation to matter. Let me begin with this simple and obvious but nonetheless important observation. The form and matter of a horse (or of any such animal) differ only as *energeia* and *dunamis* differ, for a horse and its body are defined formally by the same account (the *hippologos*), which specifies a single being that the one is said to be in

terms of *activity* and that the other is said to be in terms of *ability*. Our questions have thus exposed the very identity between a substance's form and its matter that Aristotle introduces in his difficult remarks at the end of Book 8 of the *Metaphysics*—an essential identity between things differentiated only as an ability and its exercise differ.

Second, in the case of an animal's body, in contrast to that of the matter of accidental beings like thresholds, there is no difference between the two alternative material questions, (1) what is the formal nature of the matter qua matter? and (2) what is the formal nature of that matter qua what it is in its own right? There is, in other words, no distinction relative to the body similar to the distinction between the wooden beam qua matter and the wooden beam qua wooden beam. An animal's body does not exhibit two distinct beings, one of which is revealed by considering it as matter and the other by considering it as what it is; the essential being of the body just is its being qua matter. This is why the body is defined as an organ. We might think of the body of a living animal as its global organ; it is the organ that is to its living in general as the eye, for example, is to its seeing, or the hand to its manual activities.

But although living animals in this sense exhibit a unity of material being relative to what I facetiously termed the "material doubleness" of accidental being's matter, there is another sense in which the matter of a horse is divided in contrast to a unity that the matter of something like a ridgepole (to give a rest to our threshold) enjoys. For there is only one thing, the wooden beam, out of which a ridgepole is made and of which it then consists. We may wish to distinguish between significantly different descriptions of this thing, but it is important that these are different descriptions of the same individual. A wooden beam may be made into a ridgepole and we may then talk about it as that which constitutes the ridgepole, but there is only one thing; the two descriptions are descriptions of one and the same wooden beam. The reason for this is that the matter of a ridgepole has an essential being independent of being a ridgepole. Because it is what it is (wood or aluminum, say), it retains that identity while taking on the various functional and positional predicates that constitute its being a ridgepole.

We may recall these facts from a different but related discussion in Chapter 1, where it emerged in our early descriptions of accidental and

per se being (in that context, between thresholds and human beings).[14] In that conversation, a related contrast between accidental being and per se being emerged immediately. Here as well, it is, as we have seen, different with animals; for with animals there is no distinction between the body qua matter and the body qua body. Conversely, there is no single entity in the case of animals that plays both material roles, both that of ex quo matter and that of constitutive matter.

What is there about Aristotle's understanding of the ontology of animals that leads to these results? It is basically that living beings, as paradigm substances, exhibit most manifestly the fact that form and matter in substance are linked to the concepts of activity and the structures of ability that empower such activity. For the being of an animal or plant consists in its life functions, in the characteristic modes of activity that define its life. The specific form of its being is therefore, as we might say, its bioactivity: the configuration of these activities and of the capacities for them. Such a configuration involves the specifics of what an animal eats, how it gets its food, where it lives, the manner of its reproduction, sensation, and movement, and so on—the entire complex of capacities and activities, in other words, that constitute the manner of its life and that Aristotle thinks it is the task of the biologist to describe, understand, and explain.

The body of a living being in turn is what it is by virtue of, as we might expect, the abilities it embodies—by virtue, in other words, of its *dunameis,* its various capacities that enable an organism to perform its essential activities. The body of a plant or animal is therefore, as we have seen, essentially an organ or instrument. Its being as a body is defined in terms of its instrumental ability, the power it has that enables the performance of those life functions by which the being of the plant or animal is expressed.

The contrast between the essential instrumentality of living bodies and the matter of such things as ridgepoles, thresholds, and houses is at the heart of an interesting moment in the argument of Book 2 of the *De Anima.* In the course of explaining that the soul is a certain aspect of substance, the essential nature (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*) of a certain sort of body, Aristotle argues that "it is as if some instrument, for example an axe, were a natural body; for being an axe (*τὸ πελέκει εἶναι*) would be its

substance, and this would be its soul" (*De Anima* 2.1, 412b12–13). He continues with this interesting reflection: "Then if this were removed, it would no longer be an axe, except homonymously" (*De Anima* 2.1, 412b14). Suppose an axe, in other words, were the sort of thing that is alive.[15] If this were so, then what we presently think of as an axe, even though it looks no different from the imagined living axe, would not be one. But, as Aristotle immediately points out,

> in fact it is an axe. For it is not this kind of body of which the defining essence (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι καὶ ὁ λόγος*) is a soul, but only a certain kind of natural body that has within itself a principle of motion and rest. We ought rather to think of what has been said in relation to the parts [of an animal]. If the eye were an animal, sight would be its soul; for this is the eye's formal substance (*οὐσία . . . ἡ κατὰ τὸν λόγον*). The eye is the matter for sight, lacking which it is no longer an eye, except homonymously, like a stone eye or a painted eye. We now have to apply [what is true] of the parts to the whole living body; for as part [of soul] is to part [of body] so is the whole of consciousness to the whole conscious body as such. (*De Anima* 2.1, 412b15–25)

And, we may generalize, so is the whole of life to the whole living body. Here Aristotle clearly thinks of the body as an organ of the living animal, on analogy with the eye, and differing from that organ only as the whole differs from the part, or as a global organ for the animal's general function of life differs from a local organ for the specific and limited function of sight. It is because he here thinks of the body as an analogue to the eye that he reminds us in the next line that, as we noted at the end of the last section, "it is not that which has lost its soul that is enabled so as to live, but that which has it" (*De Anima* 2.1, 412b25–26).

5. Animal Bodies

I have argued that the body of an animal may be thought of as *essentially* or *simply material*. As a body it has no formal being other than that of serving as enabling matter, that is, as the specific and adequate

instrument for the complex activity that is an animal's life. It is this *simple materiality* of the body that we saw expressed in the fact that animals do not exhibit the doubleness of material being found in artifacts and other accidental entities, and that we have seen witnessed in Aristotle's designation of the body as essentially an organ—an *ὄργανον* in the literal sense of instrument. Recall that an organ, as Aristotle makes clear in his discussion of biological organs at the beginning of Book 2 of the *Parts of Animals,* is an instrument; it is something whose essential nature is to be for the sake of the activity of which it is the organ (*Parts of Animals* 2.1, 646a25–30; *Meteorology* 4.12, 389b23–390a10).

That the body may be thought of as an organ follows, as we saw, from our earlier recognition that the body of which we have been speaking is the living body, and not a corpse, and that the body is the animal and not something out of which the animal is made. It is because the body of an animal is the animal that a corpse is no longer a body, except in name only. As a dead eye is only homonymously an eye, so a dead body, that is, a dead animal, is only homonymously an animal (*De Anima* 2.1, 412b13–24; *Meteorology* 4.12, 389b27–390a17).

The nature of an animal's death therefore reveals an important fact about its body. Dying is not a change in a substratum, but the eradication of an entire being, a *φθορά*; in dying, an animal ceases to be. When a living being is thus no longer alive, its body—thought of as a *global organ*—is no longer a body, nor are any of its other more local organs any longer organs. No longer instruments for the performance of their functions, they no longer exhibit the mode of instrumental being that once constituted them essentially as body and organs of a living being. When an animal gives up the ghost, its body dies together with it, and neither continues to exist.

Death also reveals the distinction between animal and artifact. When the limb of a tree is removed from the tree, it ceases to be the limb of a tree and becomes a wooden beam. But when a wooden beam is removed from its position and ceases to be a threshold, it does not stop being a wooden beam. Accidental beings do not die, but merely suffer dissolution, and their matter, having a being other than that as matter, survives that dissolution.

These facts also explain why explanations of an animal's body and of its organic parts are teleological or functional in nature. I mean *teleologi-*

cal here in the particular functional sense in which an explanation is teleological if it provides a formal account of a body and its organs in terms of their being for the sake of some end, whether or not it provides a genetic account along those lines. Since the formal account of an animal's body, in Aristotle's view, forms part of the account of that animal's genesis, teleological explanation in the stronger and more common genetic sense will also be part of an Aristotelian theory. But the teleological thrust of Aristotle's thought is not centrally about the historical genesis of an animal's having a particular organ, or about such and such a type of animal having such and such organs. It is a given that animals have the kinds of lives and the kinds of biological practices they have, and therefore that they have the kinds of bodies and organs they have; for it is in terms of the former that the latter receive teleological, that is to say, functional, explanations. It is the project of providing exactly such explanations, revealing the complex structure of biological phenomena by revealing the fit and join of bodies and their organs to lives and their practices, that Aristotle justifies theoretically at the beginning of *Parts of Animals* and carries out, with his usual complexity and subtlety, in the course of that treatise.

Any difficulties that we may find with genetic teleological explanations are independent, therefore, of the main thrust of Aristotle's teleology. It is indeed only because our diachronic and genetic explanations are undertaken against the background of a synchronic and formal understanding that is inescapably functional that there is uncertainty to begin with. It is because organs are so clearly entities whose formal natures demand a for-the-sake-of account that we feel perplexed by questions of whether teleological genetic accounts are necessary or possible.

It follows from its necessarily instrumental nature that body bears a relationship to soul figured by that of ability to activity. Because the matter of an animal is a structure of instrumental ability directed toward the animal's active life as its realization, the unity of an animal is the unity of a capacity and its active exercise. This is what Aristotle means when he observes in the *De Anima* that the definition of soul as the realization of an instrumental body makes clear that it is ridiculous to ask if body and soul are one (*De Anima* 2.1, 412b4–9). We know that they are; eye and sight, more generally organ and faculty, and finally body and soul exhibit not the mere accidental unity that characterizes an independent subject

and its predicates, but the intrinsic unity that characterizes the matter and form of substance. The unity of body and soul, of substantial matter and form, like that of a subject with what it is *καθ'αὑτὸ*—by virtue of itself—are figured, I have here argued, by the unity of ability and exercise.

There is another feature of animal life that is salient: the fact that animals rest. For an animal to be able to rest, indeed to sleep, is for it to have the capacity to turn off its activities temporarily without dying. This capacity necessitates, as I earlier suggested, a further refinement in our portrayal of Aristotle's ontology of living things. We need to account for the relation between soul as first realization and actual living as second realization, and to make sense of body's nature in terms of such an account.

It is, I will argue near the end of Chapter 6, a mistake to ask whether substance is most properly understood as first or as second realization. For these are on Aristotle's view the same being; substance is a being that entities of substantial complexity exhibit, of which first and second realization differ in turn merely as capacity and activity. But these facts nonetheless have implications for our account at this point in the argument; for they make clear *in what sense* an animal's body as matter is a structure of instrumental capacities directed toward its active life, and in what sense therefore an animal is unified as ability and activity are unified. The activity that is the life of an animal is not merely the sum of second realization activities that constitute its wakeful state: seeing, hearing, thinking, or moving. The activity of an animal's life is also the first-level activity of the (mere) capacity for such activities: the first-level activity of being able to see, to hear, to think, and to move. It is primarily this mode of activity that the body, understood as the matter of the soul, is the matter of. The eye, as a living empowered organ, is the site of the ability to see, and the eye thought of in purely somatic terms is the matter of this ability. The body as matter, we might say, is the site of a capacity for the activity of having further capacities.

The view of an animal's body as a global organ may be thought to shape Aristotle's understanding of matter in general. For just insofar as an animal and its body serves as a paradigm of substance and its matter, this view of the body enables Aristotle to entertain a concept of matter

not simply as stuff, but more importantly as a site of power and capacity, as the locus of dynamic ability relative to active being.

It is in turn this concept of matter, in conjunction with the more sophisticated theory of capacity and activity elaborated in *Metaphysics* 9, that provides, as I have argued, the key to the problem of substance developed in the earlier books of the *Metaphysics,* and therefore to the general theory of being that constitutes its larger project.

6. More on Matter, Including an Objection and an Answer

I wondered at the beginning of this chapter whether we should imagine Aristotle's biology as having proceeded from or preceded his ontology and specifically his theory of substance. Whichever may be true, it is inviting to think of his reflections upon animals as the source of, or at least as confirming evidence for, the view of matter as a form of *dunamis: dunamis* not in the sense of a potentiality for becoming something other, but in the sense of an ability relative to its exercise, a capacity whether or not that capacity is in operation. The consideration of animals and their bodies, then, in providing Aristotle with a model for what we might think of as a powerful rather than a stuffy theory of matter, may historically have been of considerable importance to the development of his general theory of being.

This recognition should help us think our way through an objection to the interpretation I have offered. Suppose someone argues this way: it is not surprising that a horse's body should turn out to be essentially material in the sense you have suggested. To refer to a horse's body under the description *body* is already to specify it as matter for a more structured functional entity. But we can as well refer to the body of a house, and thus specify our reference in such a way that under just that description, it can equally be seen as "essentially material." We may want to think of such talk as metaphorical, but it is surely justifiably metaphorical. The wood and stones that make up a house and that are, so to speak, at work as the substratum of a house can reasonably be thought to constitute something importantly analogous to the body of the house. With even greater ease, we can think of the functional parts of a house—window, threshold, lintel, ridgepole, and so on—as making up

its body, and as enabling the house to carry out its functions of shelter and containment. But if we can speak of the body of a house in such a way that it appears "essentially material," doesn't the distinction for which you have been arguing evaporate? For it turns out to be not merely the bodies of living beings but the matters of complex entities like thresholds and houses as well that are essentially instrumental.

What might we say in response to such an objection? I imagine we might begin this way: Aristotle in fact is led to think of the being of matter in general in terms of instrumental ability. Consider his discussion of material being at the end of the *Meteorology:* "The uniform parts," he there writes,

> are composed of the elements, and the products of nature as a whole are in turn composed of these parts as their matter. But while all these parts are thus composed materially from the elements we have mentioned, what they are substantially has to do with their formal definition. This is always clearer in the case of higher beings and, in general, those that are instrumental and for the sake of something. It is clear for example that a corpse is a human only homonymously, and similarly that the hand of a dead person is a hand only homonymously; each is said to be a human or a hand in much the same way as we might say of a stone flute that it is a flute, since, that is, even these appear to be a sort of instrument. (*Meteorology* 4.12, 389b27–390a2)

This is familiar terrain: the fact that the remains and simulacra of instrumental beings deprived of or lacking their instrumental abilities can only homonymously be said to be such beings. But here that observation is offered as evidence that their being does not consist in what they are made of, but in what they are capable of. The argument at first appears to concern only beings of a high degree of instrumental complexity. But Aristotle at once generalizes it to apply as well to simple uniform parts and to the elements of which they in turn are composed. This is true even though "it is less clear that the same thing is true in the case of flesh and bone, and even less clear in the case of fire and water" (*Meteorology* 4.12, 390a2–20). He explains why it is difficult to recognize that even the

more elemental parts of an animal's body exhibit the instrumental being exhibited by the body's more complex parts or by the body itself. "For that 'for the sake of which' is least clear where we have gone furthest in material analysis, as if, taking the extreme cases, matter were nothing beyond itself and substance nothing other than its formal account, while intermediate beings were analogous to each of these extremes in terms of their proximity to each" (*Meteorology* 4.12, 390a2–20).

The presupposition of this explanation is that all the things under discussion in fact exhibit this mode of instrumental being. The hypothetical analogy that Aristotle offers (as the rhetorical tone in which he introduces it makes clear) is therefore just that—a hypothetical analogy. We are not to suppose that the elemental matter of living being—earth or fire, or the hot or cold—is in fact nothing beyond itself considered as material. For

> any one of these is for the sake of something, and is by no means simply fire or water, any more than is flesh simply flesh or intestines simply intestines; and this is even more so in the case of a face or of a hand. All of these, in fact, are defined in terms of function, for it is being able to perform its respective function that makes each of them what it truly is, as the eye is an eye when it can see; if it is not able to perform its function, it is what it is said to be only homonymously, like a dead eye, or a stone eye, which is no more an eye than a wooden saw is a saw, but simply an image of one. Well, the same is true of flesh; but its function is less clear than that of, say, the tongue. And it is equally true even of fire; but its function naturally is even less clear than that of flesh. And it is equally true even in the case of plants and of the nonliving bodies, such as bronze or silver. For all of these are what they are by virtue of their capacities to do and to undergo certain things, just as much as flesh and sinew; it is simply that the formal account of them [in terms of these capacities] is not clear to us. (*Meteorology* 4.12, 390a2–20)

But these remarks hardly answer the objection; they merely point out that Aristotle is on the side of the objector. For if matter in general is defined as the site of ability for the sake of something, it will exhibit the

"essential materiality" I have been ascribing to the bodies of living beings. And then the distinction for which I have been arguing indeed vanishes; that distinction was based on a difference in just this respect between the bodies of animals and plants and the matter of other beings.

In fact, however, Aristotle does not define matter in general this way, for nothing in these remarks suggests that he means his account to apply to artifacts. It may emerge, therefore, that the distinction that should interest us is not between artifacts and animals, but between artifacts and a class of beings that includes animals but includes as well the other natural kinds to which he refers in this passage: bronze and silver, for example, and the elements.

Let us consider that possibility in a moment. First, however, I want to consider a response to the objection we are discussing that is more generous to artifacts. For there is nothing in the view I have developed that denies the possibility of describing the matter of a house as its body, or indeed the possibility of describing matter in general in this way. On the contrary, the force of such a description derives from the light that the being of animals and of their bodies sheds on the general structure of form and matter. It is in recognizing the matter of an animal as not simply that of which the animal consists, but as a complex structure of instrumental capacity by virtue of which it is enabled to enact its life and formal being, that we are able to think in general of the matter of active being in terms of *dunamis,* that is, instrumental capacity and ability.

Insofar as living beings are paradigmatic of substance, the fact that the material being of artifacts may come to be understood in light of the material being of plants and animals, even though the two were initially distinguished from one another, is an instance of a more general strategy of Aristotle's *Metaphysics.* I will call this the strategy of synecdoche, for it is founded upon the trope of the same name, a trope in which the part, initially distinguished from the whole, is nonetheless made to stand for the whole.[16]

I will want to invoke this strategy again in Chapter 9, the last chapter of this book, thinking about the role that *activity* plays in Aristotle's ontological lexicon. But for now, consider by way of analogy these several moments in Aristotle's thinking. (1) The project of the central books of the *Metaphysics* as I have described it is not simply to reveal the nature of

substance, but to reveal how substance as the primary mode of being illuminates the nature of being as such. These books explore the being of substance, as revealed through the concepts of matter, form, ability, and activity, with the end of explaining the nature of being in general. It is this project of explanation that Aristotle announces at the beginning of Book 7 of the *Metaphysics* when he claims that we understand quality, quantity, place, and the like only when we know what each of these things is, that is to say, only when we understand the essential in-itself being that characterizes each of them (*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028a37–1028b3). Recall that this claim of the priority of substance is not the claim that we understand quality, quantity, or place when we know substance as the underlying substratum of which these modes of beings are predicated. It is the claim that we understand these modes of being—modes of being initially distinguished from substance—insofar as we see them as exemplifying, even if only in a qualified fashion, the being of substance.

So the argument of the *Metaphysics* begins with a distinction between substance and other modes of being, but ends with a recognition of the respect in which not all modes of being but all modes of nonaccidental being exhibit the being of substance: substance itself unqualifiedly, all other modes of being in a qualified sense. Understanding this sense in which all nonaccidental being is substance, though not unqualifiedly, is what fulfills the promise of the *Metaphysics* to explain being by explaining substance.

(2) In much the same manner, as we saw earlier, the distinction that Aristotle marks between motion and activity is not undermined by his claim that motion is itself an activity, though an incomplete one. Nor (3) is the distinction that he marks between modes of being that constitute what something is—*τὸ τί ἐστι*—and other modes of being undermined by his claim that all being is of the former kind, but in a qualified sense (*Physics* 3.2, 201b31–33; *Metaphysics* 7.4, 1030a18–24). It is precisely Aristotle's argument in these cases that motion will be properly understood only when it is recognized as an incomplete mode of activity, and accidental being properly understood only when it is recognized as a qualified form of the being by which something is what it is.

Each of these three cases exhibits the strategy of synecdoche, for in each case, the process of explanation by reference to a paradigm depends

upon the rhetorical strategy of first inscribing a distinction between the paradigm and what is explained by it, and then in effect erasing that distinction in order to effect the explanation by the one of the other. So here as well, the distinction between the matter of animals and that of artifacts does not preclude the fact that we will understand the one more subtly when we understand it in terms of the other. What begins as the marking of a radical distinction between two modes of material being thus emerges as a theory that promises to illuminate one mode of being in light of the other. To see the bodies of animals as paradigmatic of matter in general is to see the sense in which matter is not simply that of which a thing consists, but is a locus of instrumental capacity that enables a thing to exhibit the complex activity of its being.

This response answers the objection we are considering by embracing it. We were concerned that the distinction I have been exploring would vanish if we were to find that matter is a locus of dynamic ability for animal and artifact alike. That concern might now seem well founded; the generality that we have seen Aristotle accord the instrumental view of matter in the *Meteorology* seems indeed to collapse any such distinction. But the response I have here sketched recognizes that fact as part of a positive and philosophically interesting strategy on Aristotle's part.

7. Matter as a Locus of Capacity

There is one further part of the story that must be told, and it will explain our earlier observation that Aristotle's contrast is between artifacts as instances of accidental being and a family of beings that includes but is not limited to animals. Recall the text concerning the imagined axe that we read in an earlier section (*De Anima* 2.1, 412b13–24). That text highlights Aristotle's sense of the distinction between living things and artifacts such as an axe. But it also suggests that the features to which I have been drawing attention are indeed not for Aristotle the most fundamental differentiating features of those beings, or the features by which that sense of distinction is most importantly explained.

What primarily characterizes the difference between animal and artifact in Aristotle's view is the fact that a living being contains within itself a natural principle of motion and rest, whereas an artifact does not. A

horse has a nature, which is a natural principle of motion and rest, for it is what it is by nature. Although a bed has a form and is what it is, a bed does not itself have a natural principle of motion and rest, for a bed, precisely insofar as it is an artifact, is not what it is by nature.

We might also say, and perhaps should rather say, that an artifact has a nature only accidentally, for it does have a nature, but only insofar as it is the natural matter out of which it is made, and not insofar as it is an artifact. A bed, in other words, has no natural principle of motion and rest qua bed, but the bed's natural matter, the wood out of which it is made, has such a nature. The bed could therefore be said to have its nature accidentally, because as it happens, it is made out of that wood. If for instance we throw a bed into the air, it will fall down, but qua wood, not qua bed; if we were to plant it, it might sprout into a sapling, though never into a cot. The distinction to which we must attend, in other words, is not between animal and artifact, but between the natural and the accidental, where the natural is that which has within itself its own principle of motion and rest.

Aristotle describes this understanding of the distinction clearly at the beginning of *Physics* 2:

> Natural beings include animals and their parts, plants, and the simple bodies, earth, fire, air, and water; for these and things like them are what we call natural. All of these clearly differ from things that are not constituted naturally. For each of them has within itself a principle of motion and rest. A bed or a cloak, on the other hand, and anything of the same sort, qua having acquired that characteristic, that is, insofar as it is an artifact (*ἀπὸ τέχνης*), has no innate impulse for change. But qua happening to be made of stone or earth or of a mixture of these, and just in that respect, it does. (*Physics* 2.1, 192b9–23)

It is for this reason that Aristotle is sympathetic to those who hold the view (although it is finally a misleading view) that the nature of a statue is bronze and the nature of a bed is wood (*Metaphysics* 5.4, 1014b27–36; *Physics* 2.1, 193a10–12).

Once we have described the situation this way, however, the claim that the matter of an artifact is like the body of a living being can be seen to

require qualification, just as the claims that motion is a kind of activity or that all being is a mode of substance require qualification. The qualification was foreshadowed for us when earlier we briefly considered the matter of complex and highly organized beings other than living beings. Then I suggested that although the proximate matter of a complex entity such as a bed may be understood as related in itself to its form, there is eventually a matter that is not by virtue of itself the bed or what is the bed. We may now want to refigure that thought and say that there is in the case of a bed some matter which, unlike the bed, has a nature and which is naturally other than what it has been made into. An artifact, we may say, consists (eventually) of a matter that has a nature, but the artifact in itself lacks a nature except the nature of the matter, which nature it has merely accidentally.

But we may now recognize the features of substances and artifacts we have been considering as a consequence of this more basic fact: the fact that some beings have by nature a principle of motion and rest within themselves while others do not. For an artifact consists of a matter that has such a nature, but the artifact itself lacks a nature except accidentally. It is for this reason that artifacts are accidental beings in the sense we earlier explored, and it is in terms of this fact that we need to qualify our claim that an instrumental view of matter based on animal life is an appropriate account of matter in general.

Consider again what happens when we ask about the matter of the several things we have been discussing. In the case of a relatively simple accidental being such as a threshold, we said that a threshold consists of matter with a being of its own independent of its ability to act as a threshold; the wood that is a threshold, for example, is what it is wholly apart from being the matter of a threshold. We may refigure this thought as well and say that a threshold consists of matter that, unlike the threshold, has a nature, a nature that the threshold it is made out of shares only accidentally.

In the case of a more complex entity such as a house, this fact may not be immediately apparent. For we may, as we have seen, first specify the house's functional parts—window, threshold, lintel, ridgepole, and so on—using descriptions that mark them as able to make up a house in just the sense that would lead us to think of them as importantly like the house's body. But if we continue with an iterative material analysis, and ask for the mat-

ter, say, of the threshold, or perhaps of the wooden beam that is the threshold, the answer, either immediately or eventually, will resemble that of the first case: wood or some similar constitutive material that has an independent natural being of its own. Eventually, in other words, a material analysis in the case of an artifact will reveal a matter that has a nature of its own, and that exhibits no natural capacity to serve as the artifact out of which it is made. An artifact is what it is, as its name tells us, by art—*τέχνη*—and not by nature. Recall from an earlier discussion that it is just by virtue of this fact that an artifact is an instance of accidental being.

The situation in the case of an animal, however, is subtly but importantly different. Here again a first answer may refer to the organs (that is, to the differentiated instrumental parts) that make up its body, and a material analysis of these organs in turn will reveal the uniform parts that make up the various organs, and finally the elements that make up the uniform parts. But in each of these cases, the relation of matter to that of which it is the matter will be the same as that of the body of an animal to the animal: it will be one of natural instrumentality, in which matter and that of which it is the matter share the same nature. At no point will the enabling instrumentality of the matter be solely accidental to its essential and natural being.

The relation between an animal and its body is thus reproduced at every stage of an iterative material analysis with respect to the elements that make it up. At no stage do we find, as we do in the case of artifacts, a distinction of matter into two beings, one with a nature other than that exhibited in that of which it is the matter. For at every stage the being of organs and of their constitutive elements alike is naturally devoted to their instrumentality. This is not to say that the nature of what constitutes an animal's matter is in no respect independent of that fact. Unless, after all, it had a nature in some sense independent of constituting the matter of a specific animal, there would be no sense to Aristotle's arguments concerning hypothetical necessity, for hypothetical necessity explains why living beings need to be made out of such and such a matter. Nor indeed would there be sense to explanations in terms of standard Democritean necessity. Flesh as well as wood has gravity, so that a horse will also fall if thrown into the air, and the nature of the elements is whatever nature fire has qua fire and earth qua earth.

But these characteristics are all part of a complex of being that constitutes for Aristotle a naturally enabling structure of potentiality for the higher functional being of life (*Physics* 2.1, 192b14–21). There lurks here, I suspect, a noteworthy aspect of Aristotle's biological ontology. It is as though, in viewing the elements themselves as essentially instrumental for the higher forms of organic life, Aristotle sees the entire range of being as naturally ordered for the sake of the complex modes of animate activity. Motion, perception, and mind itself are in his view the natural manifestations of modes of potentiality and capacity embedded in even the most elemental forms of nature. This fact may represent an aspect of Aristotle's thought alien to many subsequent philosophies of nature, for which the emergence of complex forms of life from brute and dumb matter demands other forms of explanation, for example, the active intervention of a living creative god.[17] At a more straightforward level, however, we have merely registered the fact that Aristotle's ontology is rooted in a theory of biological nature, so it is not surprising that our path has led us from being to nature—to *φύσις*—and in particular to life.

Several things relevant to the issues we considered earlier have emerged in the discussion of this chapter. In the first place, the concept of accidental being has again proved central to an understanding of Aristotle's ontology. Unless we recognize that artifacts are understood by Aristotle as instances of accidental being in much the same sense as a horse being in the field or Abrams being pale, we will not understand properly the nature of artifacts nor, what is perhaps more important, will we understand the argument of the *Metaphysics*.

That understanding depends, as I hope has again become clear, upon recognition of Aristotle's "ontological distinction": the fact that the terms of his ontology are meant to effect a classification not of entities but of the being of entities. Throughout our discussion we have been attending primarily to distinctions not among kinds of things, but among modes of being: in this chapter, for example, to differences not between animals and artifacts, but between the substantial being Aristotle takes to be exemplified in animals and the accidental being he takes to be exemplified in artifacts. These two points are connected. Failure to recognize that Aristotle is concerned with a theory of being and not a classification of entities may beguile us into supposing that being a gray horse is an instance

of substance or into forgetting that being a threshold is a case of accidental being.

But it is not merely the differences among these modes of being that Aristotle thinks important. It is the fact that one mode is prior to and explanatory of another. I have suggested that this is a general feature of Aristotle's philosophical strategy, and that it is for this reason that an understanding of *being in general* has its roots in an understanding of living being. And a proper understanding of living being depends in turn upon an understanding of the relationship of capacity and activity that characterizes animals and their bodies. On the one hand, the biological functions understood as the modes of capacity and activity that constitute an animal's life are important for understanding the formal nature of living being. On the other hand, understanding the body as an organ or locus of capacity for such a life is equally important to Aristotle's theory of such being and, I have argued, to his theory of matter in general. Above all, central to the whole of Aristotle's biological metaphysics, as we may call it, is the functional identity of body and life in the being of animals.

An appreciation of this last fact may help us understand Aristotle's biological writings in a clearer light. It may help us understand why the explanations and descriptions of living being in those writings exhibit a constant and untroubled play among bodies, organs, life functions, and biological practices as explanatory principles, and it may help us appreciate properly the role that teleology plays as an explanatory principle. In general, it may remind us of why Aristotle thought that the complex structure of biological phenomena might be explained by revealing the fit and join of bodies and their organs to lives and their practices, to what is above the *energeia* of living substances, their being what they are.

CHAPTER 5

What Something Is

What is it for a horse to be a horse, I asked, and I offered as an answer the (recognizably philosophical) tautology: to be acting as horses act. To be a horse is to perform the characteristic activities in which a horse engages in leading its equine life, the horse's characteristic *work:* its *ergon.* To be a horse is therefore to be at work—*energos*—as a horse, or in other words—and this is the prize we were after—it is to be actively—*energeia*—a horse. The details of this complex activity, I suggested, are the province of natural science; biologists in general and equine specialists in particular are concerned with the specifics of what it is to be a horse. But we are interested in how Aristotle views this activity from a philosophical point of view, and how it is related to the being of substance. And that means at least to be interested not simply in something's *being a horse.* Our interest is more general; we want to know about something's *being what it is.* I mean to approach that question by first addressing a group of related questions in Chapters 5 and 6. I begin with some questions about the categories, from which I think we can learn more about the relation between something's being what it is and substance.

1. Two Theories of the Categories

The assertion that *being is said in many senses* is, I suggested, usually understood as an assertion concerning the diversity of the *categories of predication*. It is the thought that what we have come to know as the categories—substance, quantity, quality, place, time, and so on—represent modes of predication that are radically different from one another.[1] But how does the list of categories that Aristotle entitles *predicates*—*κατηγορίαι*—constitute a list that specifies the many senses of *being?* Or rather, which is the case: does the list of predicates classify kinds of *predicative being*—being of a certain quality or quantity, being in a certain location, and so on—or is it a list of *predicates* that classifies kinds of *entity*—qualities, quantities, locations, and the like?

The difference between these possibilities may become clearer if we consider two theories of how Aristotle's list of categories might have been generated. One theory begins with this observation: we can distinguish different kinds of questions that we ask about things in such a way that each kind of question determines a limited and exclusive range of appropriate answers. *In the Lyceum, in the library,* and *in Anaheim,* for example, are appropriate answers to the question, where is Abrams? But they are inappropriate answers to the question, what is she? or the question, how large is she? Each range of answers might then be understood to pick out a unique category of predicative being, and each term on a list of such categories will signify a kind of predicate representing a possible answer to a category of question: place predicates, quality predicates, quantity predicates, and the like. Each of these kinds of predicate may in turn be thought to determine a mode of being; that is what it means to refer to them as modes of predicative being. Here is an account that claims to describe the actual genesis of Aristotle's theory:

> Any simple proposition about Socrates, say, is an answer, probably a false one, to some question about Socrates. Any given question about Socrates will generate a range of possible answers, but not any proposition about Socrates will be an answer to this question about him. There are as many different types of predicate of Socrates as there are irreducibly different sorts of questions about him. . . . Any

> two predicates that satisfy the same interrogative are of the same category, and any two that do not satisfy the same interrogative are of different categories. In the main, Aristotle seems to content himself with taking ordinary language as his clue to the list of heads of questions and so of types of predicates.[2]

According to an alternative theory, we attend not to the different answers that are appropriate to different questions about the same thing, but to the different answers that result when, about different things, the same question is asked and asked repeatedly: the question, what is it? For example, what is Abrams?—a human. Then, what is a human?—an animal. Continuing this way, we can proceed, branch by branch up the Porphyrian tree, until we reach substance. Similar series may be generated with questions such as, what is white? or, what is gray? Or alternatively, what is a cubit? or, what is a peck? The question that asks of a subject what it is, in contrast to questions that ask, for example, about its location or color or size, is a special question with special answers. For a subject can at one moment be in a given location and at another moment not, but a subject cannot, as Aristotle repeatedly urges, at one moment be what it is and at another moment not (*Metaphysics* 4.4, 1006ba35–1009a4). Answers to the question what a subject is thus express its identity. An entity cannot fail to be what it is.

Each final answer in any such series will signify a primary genus of being to which subjects belong. *Quantity, quality,* and *location* are not terms signifying kinds of predicate, but predicates effecting a classification of entities into their ultimate kinds. Here is just such an account of Aristotle's categories, on the basis of which the author explains that although

> the primary members of the category of substance are not predicates but subjects, "substance" itself is a predicate. What is a man? An animal. What is an animal? A substance. "Substance" is the last predicate we come to if we pursue such a line of inquiry, and the names of the other categories are reached by parallel lines of inquiry. . . . The categories are simply the predicates par excellence. And individual substances are in the category of substance not in

> the sense of being predicates but in the sense that "substance" is the highest, widest term that can be predicated of them essentially.[3]

These two theories of the generation of the categories suggest two views of their function, that is, two views concerning what the categories are categories of. The first sees the list of the categories as designating kinds of predicates, whereas the second thinks of the items on the list as themselves predicates, designating different kinds of things, more indeed as a list of kinds of subjects than of kinds of predicates.

Perhaps both of these accounts are correct; perhaps Aristotle means the list of categories to effect two kinds of classification, the one into kinds of subjects and the other into kinds of predicates that can be said of those subjects. The language in which Aristotle refers to the categories appears to support such a pluralist view. Sometimes he refers to the categories as indicating kinds of predicate—*γένη τῶν κατηγοριῶν*. Early in the *Topics,* for example, we read that "the class of predicates . . . are ten in number: what it is (*τί ἐστι*), of what quantity (*ποσόν*), quality (*ποιόν*), [and so on]" (*Topics* 1.9, 103b20–22).[4] But at other times the categories are referred to as indicating kinds of being—*γένη τῶν ὄντων*. Think of the various texts we have encountered in the *Metaphysics;* here is the opening of Book 7: "Being is said in many senses, . . . for it means on the one hand what something is—some determinate thing—and on the other of what quality or of what quantity or each of the other modes of being predicated in this way" (*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028a10–13). And here is Aristotle's introduction of per se being in Book 5: "Things said to be by virtue of themselves . . . are just those indicated by the forms of predicates; for being has just as many senses as there are these forms" (*Metaphysics* 5.7, 1017a22). Finally, here is how Aristotle introduces the classification in the fourth chapter of the *Categories:* "Of expressions that are in no way composite, each signifies either substance (*οὐσία*), quantity (*ποσόν*), quality (*ποιόν*), relation [and so on]" (*Categories* 4, 1b25–27). Here the categories seem to be introduced as different kinds of entity that may be signified by a simple expression, that is, by an expression that is not a synthesis of subject and predicate. The examples that Aristotle gives of simple expressions, which include (again) *human* and *ox,* suggest a classification not simply of predicates said of subjects, but of

the subjects as well of which such predicates are said. It is this fact, among others, that might have led the author of the second theory to his view that "the classification in the *Categories* is not a classification of predicates," the view that necessitates his explaining the title of Aristotle's work in the way we noted above.[5]

Note further the difference between the first items on these lists. In particular note that the first item of the *Topics* is *what it is—τί ἐστι—* whereas the first item of the *Categories* is *substance—ousia*. This difference reveals that it would be inaccurate to say that a single list of terms serves two categorizing purposes in Aristotle's writing. But it does suggest that in fact there are two purposes. For a classification beginning with the interrogative, what is it?—*τί ἐστι*?—and therefore yielding as the first category *what it is* appears to be generated by attention to the different kinds of questions and answers *about* things, rather than by attention to the different kinds of things. The list in the *Categories,* on the other hand, begins with *substance—ousia*—and that list seems to stem from a consideration of different kinds of being, of which substance is the first.

We might try saying that the one list classifies what we say and the other what is. But this way of putting the issue may lead us to think that the question is whether Aristotle intends to classify reality or discourse. That is an interesting question, and one that is historically rich. But it is not the question at issue here, and if it were, it would be too easily answered. For any meaningful response to a question of the type *how much is something?* will signify the type of entity that is a how-much—a quantity; any meaningful response to a question of the type *where is something?* will signify the type of entity that is a where—a place; and so similarly with the other categories. In Greek, this fact is manifest; for it is only a change of accent that distinguishes the interrogative term *ποῖον* from the indefinite term (and source of the category) *ποιόν*, or the interrogative *πόσον* from the indefinite *ποσόν*. It is equally clear in English if we recall the Latin etymology of our category terms: a quantity is what is mentioned in response to a *quantum* question, a quality in response to a *quale* question. And it would perhaps be even clearer if predicates were classed in an Anglo-Saxon-based English as the what's, the where's, the how-much's, and so on. This correspondence is not accidental. To say that one mode of talking about the world is quantitative and another

qualitative is just to say that there are in the world such entities as quantities and qualities. So there is a logical connection that guarantees the correspondence between items on the two lists if we imagine them as distinguished by representing discourse in contrast to reality.

It is, after all, for this reason that a division of the world into its ultimate sorts can be achieved, in a more than accidental fashion, by attention to features of what we say about the world. The question whether language is faithful to the world is a question that can arise (apart from a philosophy class) only in partial and local contexts, not globally (even though philosophy must be periodically called upon to reassure us of the consonance). Worrying about whether Aristotle was concerned with the sorts of things that can be said or with the sorts of things that there are obscures this fact. Aristotle's is ultimately a single concern; it is a concern with the sorts of things that there can be said to be, with, as the Greek philosophical tradition is particularly equipped to say, the *logos* of being.

But the issue that we are here looking at is a different one, and concerns the relation between being as the predicative structure of propositions and beings as the entities designated by the terms of those propositions, between, for example, a subject being thus and thus qualified and a quality, or thus and thus located and a location. The considerations we raised concerning the earlier question, however, will help us here as well. For the correspondence between our saying where something is and a location, or between saying how much of something there is and a quantity, applies equally to the relation between predicative being and the being of entities.

These correspondences should highlight for us a fact to which we need to attend: the fact that predication is nothing but the logical or discursive face of being. When we predicate A of *x,* we are asserting that *x* is A, and we thus invoke a being—the *x*'s being A—an entity to which we then might refer, as we have repeatedly seen, as the A*x*. What we assert, of course, may be not true, and in this sense the predicative being that we invoke in asserting that *x* is A should perhaps more cautiously be termed merely a putative being. For if "*x* is A" is false, then the A*x* is not an actual being. Aristotle registers the fact that there is a sense in which we speak of being only in the case of such actual being: *"being* and *is* signify that something is true, *not being* that it is not true but false"

(*Metaphysics* 5.7, 1017a31–32). But this is, as he notes in a later parallel passage, a stricter sense of being, distinct both from the fundamental sense of the being of the categories and from the sense in which being is said with respect to ability and activity (*Metaphysics* 9.10, 1051b1–2).

We should note particularly this latter fact. For the sense of being as actuality that Aristotle here distinguishes, the sense in which being corresponds to the modern notion of existence and the associated notion of reality in contrast to mere potentiality, is marked by him as distinct from the logic of *dunamis* and *energeia*. It is the conflation of these two notions that the argument for reading *energeia* as activity is meant to guard against.

With these qualifications in mind, we can say the following: when we predicate *gray* of a horse, we are asserting that the horse is gray, and are invoking a being—the *horse's being gray*. This being is the correlate of the entity, the gray horse, that is, of the individual horse that is gray under the description *gray horse*. What happens when we predicate *horse* of the individual horse is, as we have already seen, a different story.

So now we can say: the two lists have but a single purpose, that of classifying the basic types of predicate, that is, the basic types of being. And this singleness mirrors at the simpler ontological level the more complex consonance at the deepest levels of discourse between what is and what can be said. Given that singleness, given, in other words, that predication—*A being said of* x—is the logical image of being—x*'s being A*—the question with which we began may seem frivolous. The two views of the categories that I asked us to choose between are merely two ways of saying the same thing.

2. The First Category of Predication: Essence and Substance

But if recognizing predication as the discursive or logical face of being seems to reconcile the two different views of Aristotle's categories, a closer look at the first of the categories reveals the problem to be less easily resolvable. Recall our theories about the source of the categories. One possible way of generating Aristotle's list, we saw, is by attending to the answers appropriate to different kinds of questions about something. But when we asked these questions, we chose a particular kind of thing

as an instance of what the questions were about. We chose the very kind of thing that Aristotle identifies as an instance of substance: the human being Abrams, for example (or in the analysis I quoted, the human being Socrates). For the purpose of generating that list, the choice of a substance seemed to beg no important question; any sort of thing might have done nearly as well. Take the color of Abrams's house, for example. We might ask quality questions about it (is it a pure or off white? bright or subdued?), relational questions (is it somewhat grayer than the white of her threshold?), and so on. But this very possibility leads to difficulties for thinking the two views of the categories consonant.

For we wanted a correspondence between (a) the kind of predicate appropriate as a response to a kind of question and (b) the final result obtained by repeatedly asking, what is it? of the being invoked by that predicate. And that seemed easy to achieve. Quantitative predicates, that is, predicates corresponding to questions asking about a subject's quantity, reveal *quantities.* And the choice of subject is immaterial. So if we ask how many dogs Rhodes has, the answer will refer to a quantity, and if we ask how many colors are in his study, the answer will still refer to a quantity. This is hardly a surprise. But when we think of essential questions, questions that ask *what something is,* the choice of subject is no longer innocent. For it is only if we direct questions to something that is, like Abrams, a substance that the correspondence in the case of the first category will result. Consider: if asking the question, what is it? of various kinds of things succeeds, as in the second story we told about the origin of the categories, in generating a categorical list, then it is obvious that there cannot be a single item that corresponds to the result of using that very question, as in the first story, to generate only the first category. So the correspondence that we saw requires that the subjects of categorical questions be limited to substances like Abrams. If we allow just anything to be the subject of the categorical questions, the multiplicity of categories will be reduplicated in the place corresponding to the first question, what is it?

If we wished, I suppose, we could imagine a faux-Aristotelian theory that takes such a step, and that arbitrarily but resolutely limits to substances the subjects about which it asks categorical questions. The question, what is it?—*τί ἐστι*?—would then be elliptical for the question, what (kind of) substance is it?—*τίς οὐσία ἐστι*?—and the correspondence

we want would be secured.[6] Such a revised version of Aristotle's theory might be attractive in several ways; it would be simple and would invest the list of categorical questions with a certain architectonic symmetry. For the questions would now be, what kind of substance? of what quality? of what quantity? and so on, rather than simply, what is it? and then, of what quality? of what quantity? and so on.

But this symmetry is not a part of Aristotle's theory. And our achievement is trivial, for it is merely the sign that we have reformulated the first categorical question so as to bring the lists into agreement, in other words, revised the theory so that there would be just that symmetry. More importantly, consider the price that would be paid by such an ad hoc revision. There would be no place in this faux-Aristotelian theory for questions and statements about *what it is* concerning, for example, a quantity or a quality. But surely we want a theory of predication that will maintain a distinction between, on the one hand, statements such as *that color is white* or *white is a color* and, on the other hand, statements such as *white is restful* or *this white is more subdued than that.* Given a distinction between what something essentially is and what it merely happens to be, we should be able to ask, as it were, what some particular case of what something happens to be essentially is.

Aristotle is aware of the situation I have outlined, and unwilling to pay the price of the revision I have imagined. Immediately after introducing the categories in the *Topics,* he remarks that

> someone signifying what something is (*τὸ τί ἐστι*) sometimes signifies a substance, sometimes a quality, sometimes some one of the other categories. For when a human is referred to and someone says that what is referred to is a human or is an animal, he says what it is (*τί ἐστι λέγει*) and signifies a substance (*οὐσίαν σημαίνει*). But when a white color is referred to, and he says that what is referred to is white or is a color, he says what it is and signifies a quality. Similarly, if a magnitude of a cubit is referred to, and he says that what is referred to is a magnitude of a cubit, he says what it is and signifies a quantity, and similarly with the other categories. (*Topics* 1.9, 103b27–36)

We might imagine—to continue for a moment our dalliance with faux-Aristotelian theories—an even more radical alternative to Aristotle's

actual theory. Suppose a precategorical category of predication stating what something is—*τί ἐστι*—and an additional category of predication, *of what substance,* linked to substances as the predicative category of *quality* is linked to qualities. This imagined alternative to Aristotle's theory is hardly an improvement. For the categorical questions are still asked with reference to substances, and the first, what is it? has once again been replaced by, what substance is it? Meanwhile the new first precategorical category is in reality not a category at all, but a metacategory, as it were, ranging over all the categories and expressing a relation between items in any particular one of them.

Aristotle sometimes seems attracted to a version of this theory. At the end of the passage from the *Topics* at which we looked a moment ago, he asserts that when an item in any one of the categories "is said of itself, or when its genus is said of it, that signifies what it is (*τί ἐστι*)" (*Topics* 1.9, 103b37). But by itself such an account is, as we can infer from what we have already seen, too egalitarian. For Aristotle's mature view is, as we know, that there is a special and privileged relation between, on the one hand, substances and, on the other, predicates that indicate what a thing is, a privileged connection between *ousia* and *τί ἐστι* predication.

This view is most clearly articulated in an important and well-known passage in 7.4 of the *Metaphysics* to which we have already referred. Aristotle there cites, as in the *Topics,* the variety of reference that characterizes answers to the question, what is it?—*τί ἐστι*: "What something is (*τὸ τί ἐστιν*) signifies in one sense (*ἕνα μὲν τρόπον*) substance and a particular something, but in another (*ἄλλον δὲ*) each of the ways of being predicated, quantity, quality, and the like" (*Metaphysics* 7.4, 1030a18–20). Notice, however, that whereas in the *Topics* Aristotle speaks of *what something is*—*τὸ τί ἐστιν*—as signifying sometimes substance, sometimes quantity, sometimes quality, here he speaks of it as signifying in one sense (one *τρόπος*) substance, in another the categories other than substance. That difference is elaborated as Aristotle continues:

> For just as is (*τὸ ἔστιν*) belongs to all things, not, however, in the same sense, but to one sort of thing primarily and to others in a secondary and dependent sense, so also what something is (*τὸ τί ἐστιν*) belongs unqualifiedly to substance, and to other things in a qualified sense. For even of a quality we might ask what it is, so that quality

> also is what something is, but not unqualifiedly. (*Metaphysics* 7.4, 1030a20–26)

These are important remarks. They make clear that Aristotle would have been satisfied with neither of the revisions I have outlined, and they highlight the fact with which we began, the fact that there is a special relation between predication stating what something is and the being of substance. This special relation between something's being what it is and substance is indicated in these remarks in two different but related ways: (1) by the analogous position that Aristotle gives to each in the systems respectively of predication and being, and (2) by the privileged relation between the two that he affirms explicitly.

3. Essence and the Subjects of Predication

Why should the relation between saying what something is and other kinds of predication be thought to be an analogue of the relation between substance and other kinds of being? Why, in other words, should we think that the priority of substance is mirrored in the priority of predication that indicates something's being what it is?

Recall that at the beginning of Book 7 of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle opens his discussion with the dual assertion that being is said in several senses and that one of these, substance, is prior to the others. He elaborates upon the second part of this claim by observing that "there are many senses in which something is said to be primary, and in all of them substance is primary" (*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028a31–32). He distinguishes several of these senses and argues for the primacy of substance in one of them on the grounds that "we think we know each thing most fully when we know of a human or of fire what it is, rather than its quality or quantity or place, since we know each of these very things also when we know what the quality or the quantity is" (*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028a31–32).

As I earlier noted, Aristotle here offers a feature of something's being what it is as an argument in favor of the primacy of substance relative to the other categories. And I adduced this as evidence of the conceptual and not merely ontic primacy of substance. For our ability to predicate of a subject a quantity or quality depends upon our ability to indicate

what the quantity or quality is, not upon our ability to indicate what the subject is.

But it is the latter priority that I want to invite us first to think about, and specifically the priority of our ability to indicate what a subject is, not simply in the sense of identifying the subject, but in the sense in which we might be able to indicate the subject's being what it is. Is there a respect in which our ability to predicate accidental attributes of a subject is dependent upon our being able to say what the subject is?

Aristotle offers no explicit answers to this question, nor does he offer arguments in favor of a dependency that might support what I have suggested is the parallel between substance and predicates that state what something is. But I think that there are considerations that might point in that direction, and that I think are in conformity with an Aristotelian understanding of the nature of predication and being. So although the thoughts I will offer, which are rather primitive thoughts about reference and predication, are not explicitly Aristotle's, I think they capture the central intuition that informs this facet of his thought.

Here is one kind of predicate for which such dependency seems true: a predicate the sense of which is not complete without reference to the nature of its subject. To understand, for example, what it means to say that some subject is good or real or small, it is necessary to know what the subject is. Since the very same features may make something a good conductor and a bad insulator or a real work of art and an ersatz can of beans, it is not possible to know whether a subject is good or real without knowing the answer to the question, good or real what? To know, therefore, whether and in what sense such an incomplete predicate is true of a subject, it is necessary to know what the subject is (or at least is understood to be) an instance of.[7]

So for some predicates, to be successfully employed depends upon an ability to say what the subject of predication is. But doesn't the ability to pick out such a class indicate that not all predicates are of this sort? One method of revealing the existence of this class would be to contrast the clarity of a statement like *I don't know what that is, but it's red* with the oddity of *I don't know what that is, but it's good.* Doesn't such contrast, we might ask, show that it is not in general necessary to be able to say what something is in order to predicate significantly *is red* or *is in the*

Lyceum of it? But note how much is hidden in the demonstrative *that* when we pronounce that to be red. Is red the same color when it is the color of copper and when it is the color of cabbage? Or of a youngster's red hair? Or of a sorrel horse? Cabbage is also green; could a number, or a thought, or yesteryear be green? And what would it mean to say that any of these things is green? Of course a poet might: think of "colorless green ideas sleep furiously" or of "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower drives my green age."[8] But to know what a green idea is, we have to know what an idea is.

So perhaps incomplete predicates merely exhibit a *greater* dependence of the sort we are thinking about than do other predicates (as well as a more straightforward applicability cross-categorically). But it does not follow that what a subject is is irrelevant to our ability to predicate green of it. Some understanding of what a subject is, even if only its broadest categorical type, may be a condition of predication. It is one thing for there to be a piece of gold in my tooth, another for there to be a pain; one thing for anger to be in the stadium, another for Abrams to be there.[9]

Here is another thought. We are asking for conditions of predication, the activity in which we say something about a subject or characterize it in some way. This may not be the same as asking for conditions of our ability to speak and think in general.[10] But it is to ask for conditions of successfully expressing a judgment that (a) affirms or denies something of something—*τὶ κατά* or *ἀπὸ τινός*, as Aristotle puts it—and that (b) is capable of being true or false (*On Interpretation* 5, 17a20–21; 6, 17a25).[11]

One condition of such predication is the possibility of *reference.* If we are to characterize a subject in some way—to say something about it—we must be able to specify the subject that we thus mean to characterize, to differentiate it from among other possible subjects in the world. Since we cannot say anything about nothing in particular, every act of predication thus requires an act of reference. And if judgments are the sorts of things that can be true or false, then to understand what a proposition expresses, we must know under what conditions it would be true and under what conditions false. But these requirements involve being able to specify what subject or subjects the predicate must characterize or not for the predication to be true.[12] It follows that to say anything in particular it is necessary to have the ability to refer to something in particular. Even if a

predication may have anything for a subject, it must have something, and some identifiable thing.

A condition in turn of successful reference is that we be able to indicate what the subject to which we are referring is. I do not mean simply that we must be able to indicate what we are referring to; that would be no different from being able to refer, and I am thinking about conditions of that reference. I mean that we must be able to identify a referent as this or that such-and-such. For while the possibility of pointing to a particular may ultimately be a necessary condition of successful referring, pointing itself is not sufficient.[13] It must be clear *what* it is that I am pointing to. If I merely point in the direction of Abrams and say something about a subject identified merely as *that*, there are countless possible subjects to which I might be referring: the person, her color, her size, her shape, her cloak, the color of her cloak, the style of her cloak, the political rhetoric of her wearing such a cloak, and so on. There must be available some further means of specifying what it is that I am pointing to. We might not actually employ such means in a given situation, for the context and shared lives of conversants will usually make clear what even a bald gesture, or what the nearly bald *that*, refers to. But for this to be true, we must be able to perform an explicit act of identification. We must have at our command the capacity to make clear what we are referring to.

The same considerations that suggest that pointing is insufficient except against a background of possible further identification suggest that what is sufficient for identifying a referent in one context may be insufficient in another context or by itself. *The one to the left of Abrams* may unambiguously identify a subject, but only because it is at least implicitly clear that it is a person (or a color or a shape or a place) to which we are referring. It must always be possible, with respect to a referring gesture or pronoun or referring expression like *the one to the left of Abrams* to answer the question, the what to the left of Abrams? And this question shows that we must ultimately have recourse to expressions of the form *that such-and-such*—expressions that indicate what something is: that human, that shape, that color.

Expressions capable of identifying an object of reference need not be at the explicit command of any given individual. But such expressions must be available within the conceptual repertoire of the linguistic

community, a community to which even infants belong. Nor is it necessary that what a subject is be identified by a separate act of predication actually stating what it is. Subjects are standardly identified by means of identifying terms in (usually the subject position of) our predications: *that horse lost the trotting match at Union Course, that green is too deep for the curtains.* But in order for these phrases to succeed as identifying references, we must be able to formulate and understand predications such as *this color is green, green is a color, that animal is a horse, a horse is an animal.* Similarly, a proper name like *Lady Suffolk* can succeed in singling out and identifying a subject about which we mean to be speaking, as in *Lady Suffolk lost the trotting match,* but only by virtue of our ability to formulate and understand predications of this sort: *that horse is Lady Suffolk, Lady Suffolk is a horse.*

4. Substance and the Subjects of Predication

If it is a condition of predication that we be able to indicate what a subject of predication is, this fact may be reflected in the special relation Aristotle takes there to be between, on the one hand, substance and, on the other, predicates that indicate what a subject is, between *ousia* and *τί ἐστι* predicates. If there were no substances, we read in the *Categories,* "it would be impossible for there to be anything else. For all other [beings] are either said of primary substances as of a subject or are in them as in a subject. So if there were no primary substances, it would be impossible for there to be anything else" (*Categories* 5, 2b5–7). Just so, if all predication expressed a relation between a predicate and an independently identified subject, without any predication serving as the means for the identification of that subject, we would never know, literally, what we were talking about. If, in other words, all predication were accidental, such that there were no predication that indicated what things are, there could be no predication at all. Such is Aristotle's claim in the *Metaphysics:* "If everything were said accidentally, there would be no first thing which they were about, given that the accidental always involves predication of some independent subject. It would then necessarily go on to infinity. But this is impossible" (*Metaphysics* 4.4, 1007a33–1007b1).

So substance and essence are analogous in this way: they occupy analogous positions of, respectively, ontological and logical priority with respect to predicative being. Without the one, there could be no entities; without the other, no predication about these entities. But we may still ask: what is the special relation that this class of predicates and substances bear to one another apart from their analogous positions? What, if anything, can be said for the stronger claim that the only predicates that can without qualification indicate what something is are those that indicate what a *substance* is? It is this stronger claim that Aristotle makes in *Metaphysics* 7.4, when he suggests that the relation between substance and predicates indicating what something is constitutes an image of the relation between substance and being.

Here are two further features of how we identify the subjects of predication that may help us understand the reasonableness of this stronger claim. First, we are characteristically able not only to identify a subject to which we refer, but to identify it as the same subject as that to which we referred on some other occasion. Second, we are characteristically able to distinguish between identifying an individual subject and identifying a kind of subject.

These capacities are critical to our discursive lives. For if we had no way of determining whether or not references on different occasions were references to the same subject, we could make no sense of predicational modalities, most notably of assertion and denial, or therefore of truth and falsity. For we would be unable to determine whether any one judgment had the same subject as any other. If one judgment, for instance, were to assert a predicate of some subject, and another were to deny it, it would make no sense to ask whether the assertion and denial were with respect to the same subject.

In such a world, there could be no real distinction between a true and a false judgment, for there could be no distinction between someone rightly and wrongly having affirmed (or denied) a predicate of a particular subject. This fact is the predicative shadow, as it were, of a deeper metaphysical truth: if reidentification were not possible, it would be like encountering at each instant a wholly new manifold of individuals, like living in a world in which we lacked the means to refer except to

the immediate present, and therefore lacked any concept of a past or future. And then we would lack powers of reference to different segments of reality by virtue of which we could specify which instance of a kind we were talking about. But in such fabulous circumstances, where predication could at best only be general, all of our notions of discursive rationality would collapse.

What can we learn from this fable? One thing is that the ability to specify kinds (human, for instance) is necessary to our ability to identify the subjects we mean to refer to, just as the ability to specify which human we mean to refer to is. For these abilities we need a matrix of time and we need persistent referential points that we can identify as the same throughout time, neither of which would be possible without the ability to reidentify. Similar considerations argue for the necessity of a distinction between kinds and individual instances of kinds. If we could designate only specific instances of a kind, or if we could designate only kinds, predication would no more be possible than it would be possible for a language to consist only of proper names or only of general terms.

These two conditions presuppose a distinction between predicates that identify a subject as what it is and those that ascribe an attribute to an independently identified subject—a distinction, in other words, between essential and accidental predicates. If every predicate identified a subject as what it is, and none attributed an accidental attribute to an independently identifiable subject, then nothing could remain one and the same individual through change, and there could therefore be no criteria for the reidentification of a subject over time. In addition, any reference to *a such and such* could not be to an instance of such and such, but only to a kind of such and such. Nor could proper names serve to identify and pick out individual referents; in *Milton was a poet,* the name *Milton* would function as in "Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest," that is, to signify a Miltonic kind of person, and *the Milton who here rests* could in turn only pick out a kind of Milton.

The impossibility of these heraclitean and parmenidean fantasy worlds is linked to Aristotle's demands for determinate subjects.[14] In these past two sections, I have imagined the sorts of considerations I think might lead us to recognize those demands. The arguments I have offered are not, as I said at the beginning, explicitly Aristotle's, but I

think they capture the central intuition that informs his thinking. A condition of there being predication is that there be subjects about which we can say what they are, that is to say, that there be essential predicates. It is the distinction between essential and accidental predicates that allows for determinate subjects of which accidental properties may be meaningfully predicated.

5. Substance and Determinate Essence

So here is the thought that I have suggested underlies Aristotle's discussion of substance and essential predication: determinate modes of being are necessary to identify subjects if accidental attributes are then to be predicated of them. This is a version of what I identified earlier as a central element in Aristotle's theory of substance, the view that determinate identity is a condition of the possibility of determinability, having an essence a condition of being a subject. By itself, the necessity for determination requires neither that there be some particular class of predicates exemplary of such a determinate mode of being nor some particular class of entities especially qualified to be the subjects of such predicates. It requires only that some predicates or other be essential to some subjects or other. In one sense, the same is true of Aristotle's linking of such predicates with substance. For *substance* may be thought to be merely the name of whatever mode of being should prove essential to subjects. In this sense, therefore, Aristotle's view is neutral insofar as it is compatible with an ontology that withholds priority from any particular kind of entity or predicate.

But in fact the linking already presupposes the kind of being Aristotle has in mind as substance. Attend to how, in the earliest accounts of substance, he describes this property of determinate identity as its most characteristic feature:

> What appears to be most characteristic of substance is that what is numerically one and the same individual is able to take on contrary attributes. Among the other [categories] one cannot cite anything, anything in other words that's not substance, which is able to take on contrary attributes while numerically one. A color, for example,

> that is numerically one and the same individual will not be white and black (*λευκὸν καὶ μέλαν*), nor will numerically one and the same action be mean and honorable; and so with everything else that is not substance. But a substance, while numerically one and the same individual, is able to take on contrary qualities; for instance, a particular human, one identical individual, will at one time be light and at another time dark (*ὁτὲ μὲν λευκὸς ὁτὲ δὲ μέλας*), at one time warm and at another cold, at one time mean and at another honorable. (*Categories* 5, 4a10–21)

Here indeed Aristotle characterizes substance as sufficiently determinate to have other attributes accidentally true of it. A substance, without surrendering its determinate identity—while remaining, in other words, exactly what it is—is open to further accidental determination. It is just because it has the determinate identity that it has—because it is what it is—that substance is on Aristotle's view open to such further determination and thus capable of constituting the ultimate and paradigmatic subject of predication.

The example of color that Aristotle cites in this passage as an instance of being from a category other than substance is meant to provide a contrast to substance; the feature I have noted as true of substance is true only, as Aristotle states, of substance, and of substance understood in contrast to such beings as colors. A color lacks the determinate identity that would allow it to remain the same individual while serving as subject, on different occasions, of contrary attributes; it is overwhelmed by any change of its attributes.

Why should Aristotle think this true of colors? We might say: because a particular color is defined by what color it is, so that it cannot become another color. A given white, for example, cannot become black and remain the same individual. But in what sense is this a contrast with substance? One substance cannot become another substance, that is, an instance of another kind, determined by a different *what,* and remain the same individual. This is the force of Aristotle's recognition that cases of substantial change are not cases of one and the same identifiable subject being first one substance, then another, but of an individual going out of

existence to be replaced subsequently by another and different individual (*On Generation and Corruption* 1.4, 319b6–32).

The difference in question between attributes that identify and those that are accidental is critical not merely for a theory of change, but for a theory of predication and being as well. I have just learned that Abrams has changed her residence; what do I know? It is one thing if she has moved out of her dull house in Anaheim and into a bright new house in Cucamonga, another if she has merely repainted her Anaheim house a new and brighter white. To be able to distinguish these cases is to have a theory that allows for identifying a continuing subject.

So then why not colors? Suppose that Abrams's house in Anaheim, having dulled over the years, undergoes a change similar to the one we just spoke of, but less costly; she washes it. And now the house, yesterday a pallid and lackluster white, is restored to its former bright and gleaming white. Why shouldn't we say in such a case that one and the same color—the white of Abrams's house—was once dull but is now bright?

We need to be able to distinguish in this case what might be a counter-instance to Aristotle's claim—a color changing from dull to bright—from what is clearly not a counter-instance—a new bright color replacing an old dull one. But could we make such a distinction other than by assimilation to the earlier distinction between the same house being first dull and then bright white, and one dull white house being replaced by a different shiny white house? We are able to distinguish between one and the same color being first dull, then bright, and one bright color replacing another dull one, only by determining whether the same subject of which the color is predicated as a quality was first dull and then bright. Colors can be said to be determinate individuals only by (at least implicit) reference to and by virtue of their dependence upon the determinate individuality of the subjects of which they are the colors.

By being a determinate individual here, I do not mean simply being a particular. Of course colors can be thought of as particulars, but we must not mean particular sorts or shades of color, but particular individual instances. Imagine Pappadopoulos telling his painter that the color he wants on his house in Azusa is the white of Abrams's house, and then

objecting because the painter had only matched it, not brought Abrams's color itself. Pappadopoulos would be mad to make such a demand, but that is the kind of individual color we are asking after. If we were to settle for particular sorts or shades of color, the properties of the color in question would be defining, and then as we saw, there could be no reidentification and therefore no question of the color changing.

But could we refer to a color as a particular individual and not as a kind without that reference being dependent upon reference to a subject of which the color is predicated? Clearly no general color properties will serve this purpose. *That white* will no more make possible an identifying reference in this case than will *that color;* for we should need some way to establish that by *that white* we mean to refer not to a shade of white, but to some specific instance of the shade, where *some specific instance of the shade* cannot, in turn, mean antique as against oyster white. But there is no way to distinguish between reference to a shade and to an instance of that shade other than by reference to the color as the color of some particular subject. We can refer to the color of Abrams's house as a particular individual only by virtue of our ability to refer to it as, for example, *the color of Abrams's house.* (In a moment, however, we will see that the case is not this simple.) This fact parallels Aristotle's claim early in the *Categories* that particular qualities such as colors are always present in a subject: "this white (*τὸ τὶ λευκὸν*) is present in a subject (*ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ*) namely in a body, for every color is in a body" (*Categories* 1, 1a28–29).

We are able to speak of an individual *quality* as having properties not all of which constitute what it is—properties, in other words, some of which are not essential—and, consequently, as a particular that persists and is distinct from the kind of which it is an instance only by virtue of our ability to refer to a subject of which it is the quality. More generally we may say: accidental properties are not identifiable particulars except insofar as they are the properties of (Aristotle would say *present in*) identifiable subjects, upon whose identity their identity is dependent. It is not so much, in other words, that qualities lack essences, as that there can be no distinction between their essential and their accidental properties except by reference to the subjects of which they are the attributes.

Alternatively, we might want to say that it is not the color of Abrams's house that has changed, but the house itself that was once dull and has

become bright. This way of thinking of what has happened echoes Aristotle's contention that cases that appear to be instances of one accidental attribute characterizing another are in fact cases in which both accidentally (that is, coincidentally) characterize a common subject. "The accidental is not accidental to the accidental, except insofar as both are accidental to the same thing. I mean, for example, that the white is educated or the educated white only because both of these belong accidentally to a human" (*Metaphysics* 4.4, 1007b2–5). And if that contention is true, then the argument of the *Categories* concerning colors is correct.

Aristotle's view involves two further claims: the first is that all cases of qualities, quantities, and other accidental attributes are like this case. Properties that we predicate of such attributes, for example, of qualities, either properly characterize some subject that has the quality and only in a derivative sense characterize the quality or so radically characterize the quality that their disappearance entails the disappearance of that particular instance of the quality, unless by *that particular instance of a quality* we mean *the quality of that subject.* There appears no way to specify a determinate and yet persisting quality other than by reference, however implicit or oblique, to a determinate and persisting subject of which it is the quality. The second claim is this: ultimate subjects upon which depends our ability to refer to particulars are the kinds of beings Aristotle terms *substances.* It is therefore only with respect to such substances or by virtue of the possibility of ultimate reference to them that the identity of determinate and essential being is possible. But only such identity makes possible accidental predication with respect to an independent and determinate subject. We can now see the full and further import of the claim about coaccidentals I have just cited. To say that a gray horse is in the field is to say that the horse, which is gray, is also in the field; to say that the threshold is blue is to say that the wood, which is a threshold, is also blue.

These are the facts that together constitute for Aristotle the fundamental link we asked about between substance and predication stating what something is—between *ousia* and *τὸ τί ἐστι*. And these considerations specify the basic logical conditions of being a substance: (1) it is possible to say what it is, (2) it is not necessary to make reference to beings outside itself in saying what it is, and (3) it is possible to predicate

of it contrary qualities that are accidental to its being what it is. Explaining just what things for Aristotle fulfill such logical conditions, and why they do, requires connecting this account to the discussion of Chapter 4 concerning substance and artifact.

6. The Essence of Other Being

But we need now to make clearer how for Aristotle there can be predication concerning items in categories other than substance that identifies what those items are. Unless we can do this, we will have been led to that Pyrrhic victory that we earlier wanted to avoid. What kind of theory has no place for predications like *white is a color* or *oyster is a shade of white?* The analysis of coaccidentals we have just noted according to which *the white is pale* really means *that which is white is (also) pale* will not immediately help. For *white is a color* cannot mean *that which is white is a color;* it is not the white subject that is a color, but white itself.

> In most cases of things present in a subject, neither the name nor the definition is predicated of the subject. In some cases, nothing prevents the name from sometimes being predicated of the subject, but the definition cannot be. For example, white, which is present in a subject since it is present in a body, is predicated of the subject; for the body is called white. But the definition of white can never be predicated of the body. (*Categories* 5, 2a26–34)

But perhaps we can understand according to this analysis predications like *the color that is white is (specifically) antique white* or *the color of Abrams's house is white.* This possibility seems to afford us a way to consider colors sometimes as subjects.

The analysis of coaccidentals also suggests, however, that it would be oversimplified to suppose that a phrase like *the color of Abrams's house* refers identifyingly to a specific individual color. For it should suggest to us that in a predication like *the color of Abrams's house is white,* the phrase occurring in the subject position may be intended in either of two ways. In one case, we may mean to indicate referentially (1) *the color that Abrams's house in fact happens to be* (white); thus I may have often visited

Abrams's house and noted the color, but want to have that color identified and so ask, what is the color of Abrams's house? that is to say, what is that color? To which the answer is, that color is white. But in another case, we may mean to indicate attributively (2) *the color of Abrams's house, whatever color that might be* (as it turns out, white); so wanting to know the color of the house, which I have never seen, I ask, what is the color of Abrams's house? in which case I am asking about the house, namely, asking what color it is. To which the answer is, that house is white. So it is only in the first of these cases that the phrase might be thought to refer to a color. In the second case, the predication is in fact about Abrams's house; it is that, and not its color, that is said to be white.

Notice now how this difference emerges if we consider the following question: in *the color of Abrams's house is white,* does the predicate *white* indicate what the subject is, or does it merely indicate some accidental attribute of the subject? The answer to this question depends on how, as in the preceding paragraph, we construe the referring phrase in the subject position: *the color of Abrams's house.* If we mean to indicate by this phrase referentially the *color that Abrams's house in fact happens to be,* then we mean to refer to the color white, and to assert that this color is white is to indicate what it is. But if we mean to indicate by it attributively the color of her house *whatever that color may be,* the situation is quite different. Suppose Pappadopoulos does not know what color Abrams's house is. If his painter informs him that the color of Abrams's house is white, this is simply equivalent to the predication *Abrams's house is white.*[15] To predicate white of the subject of our assertion in this sense is therefore to predicate accidentally—*κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς*—that is, it is to predicate of an independent subject. The color white, in other words, is white in a mode different from that in which Abrams's house is white.

Note then how differently in this case the predicate functions in *Abrams's house is white* from how it would function in *white is white.* For in this case, *white* is accidental to an independent subject, as in the case of a white human. Being white, Aristotle observes in the *Metaphysics,* "is accidental to a human because he may be white, but he is not *just what white is* (*ὅπερ λευκόν*)" (*Metaphysics* 4.4, 1007a33).[16] *He is not just what white is—ὅπερ λευκόν*—here means that white is not essentially

what he is, but is merely what he happens to be. That which is *ὅπερ λευκὸν*, such that white is just what it is, is the color white. It is what is indicated by the expression *the white*—*τὸ λευκόν*—when that expression, which may refer, as Aristotle points out later in the *Metaphysics,* "both to what the accidental quality belongs to and the accidental quality itself" (*Metaphysics* 7.6, 1031b24–25) refers to the latter rather than to the former. And being white "is not the same as the human [who is white] or the white human, but it is the same as the quality" (*Metaphysics* 7.6, 1031b27–28).

Thus white is just—that is, exactly—what the quality white is, but a white thing is just—that is, merely—white. We may gloss this as follows: when we say that white is white, there is not a separate subject of which *white* is predicated other than white itself. But when we say that a house or a human is white, *white* is predicated of a separate and independently identifiable subject, *the house* or *the human.* As we saw earlier, Aristotle describes this difference by saying that white is white per se or by virtue of itself—*καθ'αύτό*—whereas a white thing is white accidentally—*κατὰ συμβεβηκός*. In the latter case but not in the former, the white is said of a subject other than itself. Thus among the instances of an attribute true of a subject by virtue of itself is that which is

> not said of a subject other than itself, as that which walks is something else that is walking, and so with that which is white. Whereas substance, that is, whatever signifies a what, is, without being anything else, exactly what it is. Things not said of a subject I describe as by virtue of themselves (*καθ'αύτά*); things said of a subject I describe as accidentals (*συμβεβηκότα*). (*Posterior Analytics* 1.4, 73b5–10)

Returning to our earlier example, we may now say this: in the first case we distinguished, in which *the color of Abrams's house* refers referentially, the phrase refers to something per se white, white by virtue of itself, as to say that *white is white* is not to predicate *white* of some independent subject. But in the second case, in which *the color of Abrams's house* refers attributively, we can understand the phrase to refer to a color only by virtue of our ability to identify that color as *the color of some in-*

dependently identified subject, which in this instance happens to be a (white) house. And in that case, the color of Abrams's house can be said to be white only accidentally. Our ability to say that a color is just what it is by virtue of itself thus rests upon differences in the sense of expressions of the form *the color of some subject.*

This is another reason why Aristotle can say, as we earlier heard him say at *Metaphysics* 5.7, that

> things said to be by virtue of themselves (*καθ'αύτα δὲ εἶναι*) are just those indicated by the forms of predicates; for being has just as many senses as there are these forms. Since among things predicated, some signify what a subject is, others its quality, others quantity, others relations, others acting or being acted upon, others place, others time, being signifies what corresponds to each of these. (*Metaphysics* 5.7, 1017a23–27)

This does not mean that an independent subject's being white is an instance of such per se being, but that being white, or white itself is. For the white thing—a house, a horse in the fields, Abrams—is not white by virtue of itself, since white is not just what it is; it is just (we could say: just accidentally happens to be) white. But white is not just (accidentally) white; white is white by virtue of itself, that is, *ὅπερ* white. White is just what white is.

In another sense, however, it is only substances that are just what they are, and thus it is only expressions stating what a substance is that denote being by virtue of itself. This contrast, between the basic sense in which substance is said to be what it is by virtue of itself and the sense in which an attribute such as a color is said to be what it is by virtue of itself, is the fundamental contrast among the categories to which Aristotle repeatedly refers. But it also makes clear why all the categories are offered by Aristotle to explain this sense of being as being in itself, the second sense listed in the division in *Metaphysics* 5.7 to which we have repeatedly returned.

The contrast between substance and the other categories lives side by side with the contrast to which I called attention in Chapter 4, that between substance and accidental being. In the course of this discussion,

we may have forgotten that contrast. I have treated Abrams and Abrams's house and Abrams's threshold as though they were equivalent. For in this context and for the purpose of contrasting (a) the relation of a subject to its accidental attributes with (b) the relation of either a subject or an attribute to what it is, they are equivalent. But we know from Chapter 4 that Aristotle wants to contrast the ontological status of things like Abrams with that of things like her house. And the contrast, as we have seen, concerns precisely the unity of their being, that is, the degree to which the various constituent elements in their being are said to be what they are by virtue of themselves or accidentally.

It must be possible, I argued earlier, to distinguish between predicates that indicate what a subject is and can be used to identify it and those that are accidental to a subject, a subject that can and must be independently identified. It is important to add *and must be independently identified,* for otherwise being a human would be accidental to Abrams, because she can be independently identified as *that animal.* She cannot, however, be identified as *that white thing* except against a background of the possibility of other identification. It is for this reason that Aristotle disallows *the white thing* as a primary subject of predication.

But it is also true, we have seen, that *the white,* even when it refers to a color, cannot identify a determinate subject except against the background of the possibility of the prior identification of substances. And so in a stricter sense, white is not an instance of being by virtue of itself. Thus Aristotle says that in *the walking thing walks* or *the white thing is white,* the predicate is not true of the subject in itself, as "it is by virtue of being something else that the walking thing walks and the white thing is white" (*Posterior Analytics* 1.4, 73b7). But he does not contrast these cases with a case such as *white is white;* rather, he goes on to say that "substance and whatever signifies as this such-and-such is just what is independent of being anything else" (*Posterior Analytics* 1.4, 73b8) and therefore is per se what it is. It is what it is by virtue of itself.

All this is made explicit in a passage that ties together the different strands we have been following:

> Predicates signifying substance are those that signify just what the subject is or some kind of what it is (*ὅπερ ἐκεῖνο ἢ ὅπερ ἐκεῖνό τι*).

> Insofar as predicates do not signify substance, but are said of some other subject such that they do not signify just what it is or some kind of what it is, they are predicated accidentally, as white is of human. . . . Those predicates that do not signify substance must be predicated of some subject; nothing is white that is not something other being white. (*Posterior Analytics* 1.22, 83a23–33)

We should gloss this last sentence as: nothing is identifiable as *that white* that is not identifiable (eventually) as the attribute of something identifiable as *that substance.*

The intimate connection between predicates that state what something is—*τί ἐστι*—and those that state what a subject is in itself—*καθ'αύτό*—a connection repeatedly made explicit by Aristotle, should by now be clear (*Posterior Analytics* 1.4, 73a34–37; *Metaphysics* 5.18, 1022a25–28; *Metaphysics* 7.4, 1029b13–16). And perhaps we are now in a position to say in what sense there is essential predication concerning items in categories other than substance. It is just in the sense that items in these categories are instances of being by virtue of itself—are whatever they are *καθ'αύτό*. We wish to say that they are instances of being by virtue of itself in order to distinguish between white and a white house, and in order to distinguish between cases in which *the color of Abrams's house is white* refers to a particular color and cases in which it is merely an oblique way of predicating white of her house. But we wish to say that they are not instances of being by virtue of itself in order to signal the dependence of our ability to refer to such beings on our ability to refer to substances, which alone are strictly instances of being by virtue of itself. If we distinguish between the being by virtue of itself signified by *human* and the accidental being signified by *white human,* then we will want to classify the entity signified by *white* sometimes with the one, sometimes with the other, depending upon what features of difference and similarity we wish to emphasize.

But to the degree that essential predication is possible concerning entities in the other categories, it should be clear that it is possible only by virtue of there being substance-identifying predicates. Such is the burden of the analogy drawn at *Metaphysics* 7.4. As the being of a quality, say, is dependent upon the being of substance, which is in an unqualified

sense, so the whatness of a quality is not what something is tout court; for to say what it is demands a reference outside of itself to substance, of which it is a quality. Alternatively: because the being of a substance consists in its being what it is, a quality is what it is only in a sense relative to substance, for what it is is the quality of a substance. Thus what characterizes a quality or a quantity is not being what it is without qualification, but being what a quality or a quantity is (*Metaphysics* 7.4, 1030a30–31). And this is in a sense an instance of something being what it is, and in a sense not. So that (as Aristotle says in what is surely one of his most characteristic modes) "in a sense there is not a definition of anything other than substance, nor does being what it is belong to anything other than substance; but in a sense there is" (*Metaphysics* 7.5, 1031a10).[17]

CHAPTER 6

Something's Being What It Is

Activity played an important part in our articulation of the being of animals, a kind of being, I suggested, that Aristotle holds to be paradigmatic of substance. In articulating philosophically what it is to be a horse, we found ourselves speaking of the active exercise of the being expressed in what I called the hippologos, the account, articulated and refined by ordinary folk and expert alike, of a horse's being (*τὸ ἵππῳ εἶναι*). Being a horse, we thought, is to be actively—*energeia*—what is specified in this formula. In considering what kind of activity this being is, and how it is identified with the being of substance, we began by noting that the activity in question is the activity of something's being what it is, which we roughly thought of in terms of essence. We then looked at the degree to which this notion is identified with substance. Now we need to say something more about this being that is something's being what it is, and why we might think of it in terms of essence.

1. Several Expressions for Essence

That task is complicated, however, for those who read Aristotle's texts in translation; for understanding Aristotle's notion of essence is made particularly thorny for them by the fact that *essence* has come to be used

as the English translation of several subtly but importantly different phrases that Aristotle employs, phrases that we have yet to distinguish from one another. Here are three phrases, all of which Aristotle commonly uses, all of which we have had occasion to consider, and all of which are regularly rendered by the simple English term *essence* or some version of that term.

(1) What (something) is—*τὸ τί ἐστι*—often translated simply as (something's) *essence.*
(2) (Something's) being A—*τὸ A εἶναι*—where *A* is a predicative phrase (in Greek in the dative), often translated as the *essence of A.* Two instances that we will consider are these (because of the nature of the instance *something* has been replaced by the logically equivalent *someone*):
    (a) (someone's) being a human—*τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*, and
    (b) (someone's) being a white human—*τὸ λευκῷ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*.
(3) (Something's) being what it is—*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*—also often translated as (something's) *essence.*

The translations I have offered of Aristotle's phrases are attempts at literal renderings of his Greek, and they suggest, in contrast to the usual translations, that the phrases are different in their sense, even if only subtly different. But the Greekless reader of Aristotle will, as I have said, be confused by the fact that all these phrases are translated in one place or another by the English *essence.*[1] Phrases (1) and (3) are frequently translated simply as *essence,* phrase (2) frequently as *the essence of* the term in question: in the instance I gave as *the essence of human* or *the essence of white human.*

To set the stage for an account of what these different meanings are, I want first to offer some speculative etymology. The suggestions I will propose for the origins of Aristotle's technical expressions have only the support of plausibility, but I hope they will create the right perspective for thinking about the different notions represented by the single term *essence.* So imagine once again a context of question and answer, this time involving two different kinds of question, to each of which we can

imagine two different kinds of answer. The two kinds of question are deceptively alike, as both employ the interrogative, what is some *x?*

(1) One variety of such a what-is-it-question, which we might call the categorial, asks about some individual *what is it* in the interest of disclosing the kind or species or genus of which that individual is an instance. On one theory, as we saw in Chapter 5, the categories of predication are simply the highest answers to such questions. A question of this sort may be asked (a) about an individual identified by some form of ostensive designation. So someone visiting a zoo might inquire, pointing to an animal, what's that? in the hope of receiving an answer like, that's an okapi. Or encountering a dog-walker, someone will ask, pointing to a particular dog, what is it? Answer: it's a griffon.

Earlier we thought that these questions, because they were addressed to an animal-substance like an okapi or griffon, revealed the what-it-is that is true of the subject in each case *καθ'αύτό*, and that still seems right. But I might also ask, pointing to a piece of furniture, what is that? and here it would be correct, for reasons we explored earlier, to answer either, that's an escritoire or, that's maple. I might also ask a what-is-it question about an individual identified by name. Someone might ask about Abrams, what is she? where the appropriate answer would normally be something like, she's a marine biologist, or, she's a Muslim. We (usually) recognize that these answers do not capture something properly essential about Abrams; but the question might also be posed so as to elicit the answer, Abrams is a human being.

A categorial question might also (b) ask for the genus of something identified by a certain description. Here, what is a human being? or, what is white? asks for the kind of being of which the thing under that description is an instance: an animal or a color. These are the kind of question whose answers, we thought, yield predicates stating what something is—predicates that identify its *τί ἐστι*—by inquiring, with respect to a certain description, what larger category of being that description is a specification of.

(2) Think of the other kind of question as definitional; questions of this sort ask for a definition or elaboration of what is involved in a certain being, and of what it means for something to exhibit that being. Here, for

instance, the question, what is a human? does not mean, of what larger genus of being is a human a specific instance? but rather, what are the specific modes of being in light of which something is said to be human? and in particular, what are the principles of specification by virtue of which it is a human rather than some other sort of animal? The question, in other words, asks for an elaboration of what it is to be a human: what does it mean to be human? Note that we might also ask, what is an escritoire? or, what is a marine biologist? by which we intend to ask, what does it mean to be an escritoire or a marine biologist?

The two kinds of answer I have in mind are what we may call the material and the formal (or perhaps somewhat facetiously the informative and the trivial). (A) By a material (or informative) answer, I mean what we would standardly think of as an answer (whether true or not) to a question, what's in your bag?—my bowling shoes; where are you headed?—over to Azusa; what is a human being?—a speaking mammal, two footed, characteristically living in communities, and so on.

(B) By a formal (or trivial) answer, on the other hand, I mean the kind of answer (or nonanswer) that evaders and philosophers are fond of giving: *What's in your bag?—its contents. Where are you headed?—to my destination. What's a human being?—something that is being human.* Here an "answer" is in fact merely the formal description of whatever sort of thing might be mentioned in a more proper and informative reply: *the contents of my bag* simply means *what's in my bag; my destination* means *where I'm headed.* Of course these responses are not really given as answers to questions, except in the little game I am imagining; characteristically they are, as I suggested, means of evading a question and avoiding giving an answer. But they may also more properly be understood as variables that can have the value of any of the possible range of proper answers, or as expressions that can designate an answer.

Aristotle commonly uses such formal designating expressions, and he employs two simple methods of creating them. One method, which we have just seen, detaches and nominalizes the object of a question. In asking, what's in your bag? I am seeking to learn what are the contents of your bag. The question may be formally, if infuriatingly, answered by (and the answer then referred to as) *the contents of my bag.* A second method depends upon the nominalization simply of the question itself.

Thus each of the set of possible answers to the question, where is Abrams? may be referred to as *her where* (more coloquially, *her whereabouts*). This is, as we saw in Chapter 5, one of the competing stories to tell about the source of the predicative categories, and I think the more reasonable one. The categories may be understood as a series of nominalizations of the basic sorts of question: the *how much,* the *where,* and of course, preeminently, the *what* or *what it is.*

Given the intimate connection that we have seen between substance and what something is, it is understandable that this last phrase should come to be of critical importance in the conversation of the *Metaphysics,* even though it may prove philosophically challenging to understand how and why. It is one of the primary phrases that we have thought of as conveying Aristotle's concept of essence, and, as we will see, the important source of another. And it derives from the two types of questions I have conjectured, as both the categorial and definitional questions are basically questions that ask, what is it?—*τί ἐστι* or *τί ἦν*—about some *x*.

Imagine then a series of questions. A question of the first sort, a categorial *what-is-it* question, is asked about something, and both kinds of answer, material and formal, are given. Then a question of the second sort, a question asking for a definition of a categorial being such as might be specified in the first sort of answer, is asked about each of the answers, and again both kinds of answer are given. One instance of such a series of questions, generated by asking a categorial question of a named individual, is represented schematically in the following diagram. This is a particular and idiosyncratic exercise, and thinking it through will seem odd, as indeed it is; but there are interesting results, as seen in Figure 6.1.

Here the first question is a categorial question asked of an individual subject: (1) What is Callias? Two different kinds of answer may be offered along the lines I have suggested. (1A) The standard answer is what I have called the material or informative answer: Callias is a human being—*ἄνθρωπος*.[2] (1B) But we can also, particularly in philosophical discourse, respond with what I have called the formal or trivial answer, not really an answer at all, but what we might think of as an answer variable: Callias is what he is—his *τί ἐστι*. This formal answer, the

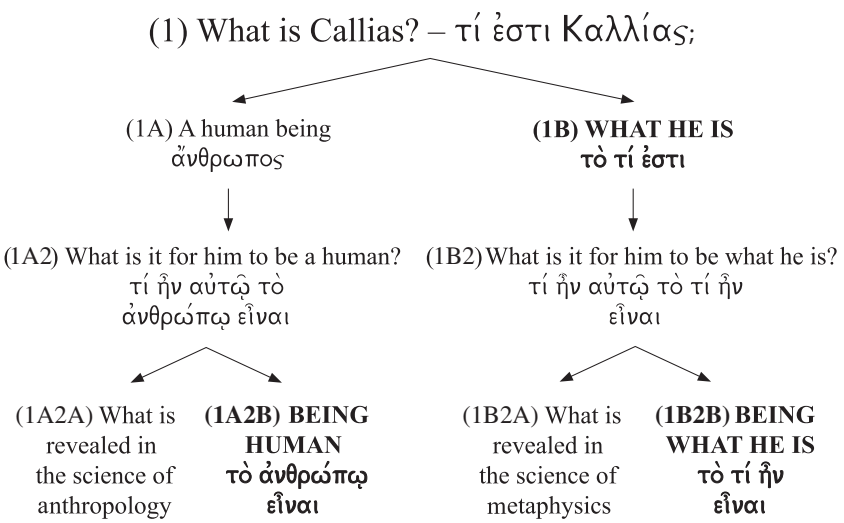

Figure 6.1. Questioning What a Human Being Is

what-it-is—*τὸ τί ἐστι*—is one of the several expressions that is—and with good reason—characteristically translated as *essence.*

The next series of questions (2) are definitional. They ask what it is for Callias or someone like him to be each of the things mentioned in the two answers: (1A2) what it is for someone to be a human being, and (1B2) what it is for someone to be what he is. A definitional question with respect to the material answer asks (1A2) What is it for someone to be a human being—*τί ἦν* (or *τί ἐστιν*) *αὐτῷ τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*? We might of course ask the question without respect to the subject: *What is being human—τί ἦν τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*; notice that in such a question the phrase expressing the object of the inquiry may change in English although it would not change in Greek. What this means is that *τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι* may be rendered in English, depending on the context, either as *what it is to be human* or as *being human.* The reason I have imagined the question as mentioning the subject is because that phrasing makes clear, as I will suggest in a moment, the reason for the dative form of *ἄνθρωπος* in *τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*. We can in fact recognize a prototype of this version of the inquiry in the question Aristotle imagines at the beginning of the *Categories:* "what is it for each of these things to be animate?—*τί ἐστιν αὐτῶν ἑκατέρῳ τὸ ζῴῳ εἶναι*?" (*Categories* 1, 1a5). Another example is

in *Parts of Animals* where an account of blood is introduced by the question "what is it for this to be blood?—*τί ἦν αὐτῷ τὸ αἵματι εἶναι*?" (*Parts of Animals* 2.3, 649b22). In these cases the dative of the central noun—*ἀνθρώπῳ, ζῴῳ, αἵματι*—occurs by attraction to the dative of the pronoun—*αὐτῷ* and *ἑκατέρῳ*.

As a result, we can recognize in this question the source of our second expression for essence; for we can again envision both kinds of answer to a definitional question. (1A2A) A material or informative answer can be constructed from the science of anthropology, or more generally of biology, and from our ordinary understanding of what a human being is—of what we are. It consists in what is entailed in someone's being a human being, the expression of which (its logos) articulates what it is to be human. (1A2B) A formal or trivial answer can be constructed in the fashion I described a moment ago; we can nominalize the interrogative. Such an answer will designate the definition of being human by the phrase *what it is for someone to be a human being—τί ἦν* or *τί ἐστιν αὐτῷ τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*. A simpler answer can be made by nominalizing merely the object of the question, and such an answer constitutes the source of the second expression for essence: *being human—τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*.

Secondly, we can ask the definitional question concerning the formal answer: (1B2) What is it for Callias or someone like him to be what he is—*τί ἦν* or *τί ἐστιν αὐτῷ τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*?—and once again we can imagine both kinds of answer: (1B2A) The material or informative answer will appeal not to anthropology or any other specific science, but to the general science that concerns itself with an analysis of what it is for things to be what they are, that is, to metaphysics or first philosophy: to what is articulated, in other words, in the *Metaphysics*. (1B2B) The formal or trivial answer, which is here merely the name of the material answer, can again be formed by nominalizing the object as I suggested, and this will generate the third of the Aristotelian expressions for essence: *what it is for someone to be what he is,* or more simply, *being what he is—τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*.

I have arranged this game so that the formal answer in each case (each of the three answers 1B, 1A2B, and 1B2B that appear in **bold type** in the diagram on page 286) turns out, by detachment and nominalization, to be one of the phrases thought to designate Aristotelian essence. Something

like this process may indeed have been the origin of Aristotle's technical terminology. But my goal here is not principally one of paleotechnoetymology; primarily I want us to be able to identify and contrast the senses of the three phrases in question in order to see what we can learn about them.

2. The Modes of "Essence"

(1) *What (something) is: τὸ τί ἐστι.*

The phrase *what (something) is—τὸ τί ἐστι*—designates the categorial essence of something; it denotes an answer to questions of the type, *What is* x?—*τί ἐστι χ*?—where *x* is a referring expression that either names something or designates it under some description.

On one understanding, the answer to such a question may be in any of the categories of predication, as long as it is in the same category as that of the referring description and identical to or generic with respect to it. This is the view that we saw at the beginning of the *Topics,* a view according to which a predicate stating what something is—a *τί ἐστι* predicate—designates, if not the being specified by the subject reference, then another being of a greater logical generality but of the same logical sort, that is, in the same category of being. In the *Topics,* recall, we read that a predicate in any one of the categories, "when it is said of itself, or when its genus is said of it, signifies *what it is—τί ἐστι*" (*Topics* 1.9, 103b35–36). On this view, a predicate stating what something is—a *τί ἐστι* predicate—designates some mode of the being that something is by virtue of the description under which it is referred to. One might think that what each thing is is simply the being that is determined by its referring description or some generic version of that being. A walker walking from here to Azusa is a walker or is a traveler, the white of my walls is white or is a color, and so on.

But on another understanding, answers to questions that ask of something what it is must be in the category of substance, and they will characteristically refer us out of the secondary modes of being and into that first category. That category is alternatively called, as we saw, substance and what-it-is—*ousia* and *τί ἐστι*. This view, suggested by the general

structural identity between essence and substance that is, as we noted, emphasized and explained several times in the *Metaphysics,* is made explicit by a two-stage argument at the center of *Metaphysics* 7.1.

> One might question whether to be walking and to be healthy and to be seated signify, any of them, what is, and similarly in any other case of the sort. For none of them is either by virtue of itself naturally what it is or capable of being separated from substance. But it is rather, if anything, that which walks that is, and that which is seated and that which is healthy. And these seem more to be because there is some determinate thing that underlies them—this is the substance and the individual—implicit in such a predicate. (*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028a20–28)

It is important to recognize that Aristotle's argument comes in two steps. First we learn that walking presupposes a walker who is walking. Then we learn that the walker similarly presupposes that which is the walker. For a walker is not what that thing is. So walking from here to Azusa is dependent upon that which walks, the walker, but a human being is what the walker is, and it is by virtue of that being—an instance of substance—that he is able to be a walking human.

Much of the power of the *Metaphysics* derives from Aristotle's ability to maintain a tension between these two views, one a broader and more generous and one a narrower and more frugal view of something's being what it is, and to illuminate their ramifications. On the one hand, (a) the view that all being is a mode of something's being what it is must be more than simply an early view of the *Topics.* For that view is at the heart of the argument of the *Metaphysics* according to which an understanding of the structure of substance will illuminate for us the nature and structure of being in general. Such an argument relies on the claim that every instance of being is in some fashion an instance of the being exemplified paradigmatically in substance, the being that preeminently is what it is.

On the other hand, (b) it is clear that the argument of the *Metaphysics* is meant to stress precisely the inequality expressed in this way of speaking—to underline and argue for the special and not simply paradigmatic status of substance. Only substances are unqualifiedly what

they are. Thus not every mode of being can really be an instance of something being what it is. Not every description, therefore, is one under which something is constituted as a what—a *τί ἐστι*.

So we may think of the categorial essence of something simply as the being of that thing as it is specified by whatever description we use to refer to it, or as some more generic mode of that being. But at the same time, the concept of categorial essence will refer us back to instances of substantial being, those privileged modes of being whose nature it is part of the project of the *Metaphysics* to reveal.

(2) *Being A*—*τὸ* A *εἶναι*

Consider next the locution *being A*—in Greek *τὸ* A *εἶναι*, with the word for which A is a variable in the dative case: for example, *τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*. A locution of this sort designates what we might call the *definitional essence* of something's being. It denotes the answer to a question of the type *What is it for* x *to be A?* where *x* is again a referring expression that either names something or otherwise succeeds in referring, and where *A* is an expression that designates the being of the thing under some description: *what is it for Abrams to be human?* for example. In a critical argument of Book 7 of the *Metaphysics,* Aristotle considers the relationship between *τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*—being a human—and *τὸ λευκῷ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*—being a white human. It is clear that in each case he means to refer to the essence of each of these things qua their modes of reference. When he speaks of being a human, Aristotle means to refer to the essence of a human—the essence of Callias, for instance, qua human. Being a white human similarly means the essence of Callias qua white human. These expressions thus designate modes of essential being: respectively, being a human and being a white human—*τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι* and *τὸ λευκῷ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι* (*Metaphysics* 7.6, 1031a20–30).

These modes of expression should interest us. For in the instance we were considering in the game I imagined, the value of A was itself a categorial essence, for I began by asking, what is Callias? where the assumption was that *Callias* designated a human, and as a result, the being specified in *being A*—*τὸ A εἶναι*—was being human. Given that Callias is human, we might think of his essential nature as being human—*τὸ*

ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι. But we have just seen that this need not be true: for we have noted Aristotle considering both the essence of a human and the essence of a white human. The notion of a definitional essence, then, is no more restricted to the kinds of being that specify categorial essence than is the concept of form limited to substance. About any being, say, P, we might ask, what is it for something to be P? and receive by way of answer a definitional essence designated by the phrase *being P.* Thus the answer to the question, what is it for something to be a white human? will specify the form by virtue of which some subject is a white human. It will therefore specify the being of a white human as defined and explicated—whatever it is, in other words, that is involved in being a white human—expressed by Aristotle *as being a white human—τὸ λευκῷ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*.

In this sense a definitional essence, as the phrase designating it suggests, is simply the formal and analytical being specified in the definition of something's being, that is, of the thing under some description, qua something or other. The phrase signifying such an essence articulates just what constitutes or is involved in the being specified in the designating dative expression. It is for this reason that the phrase is so regularly connected by Aristotle simply with being, that is, with the different predicational attributes of an individual subject expressed in the range of predications that can be made about that subject. This explains Aristotle's standard locution for those situations—situations to which his ontology is particularly sensitive—in which several beings are determined by the alternative descriptions of a single individual entity; they are said to be one in number or one and the same, but different in their being—different in their *εἶναι*—where *being—εἶναι*—is (as the surrounding dative in a number of cases shows) short for *being some A—τὸ A εἶναι*.[3]

(3) *Being what it is—τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*

Consider finally the locution *being what it is—τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*. This phrase denotes an answer to a question of the form *What is it (for* x*) to be A?* where *x* is again a referring expression that either names something or designates that thing under a specified description, but where *A* now is an expression that specifically designates, either formally or materially,

the essential what of the thing picked out by the reference—its *τί ἐστι*. As I have suggested, the phrase may be thought of as taking its wording from the formal question, what is it for something to be what it is?—*τί ἦν* or *τί ἐστιν αὐτῷ τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*? In this question, the second *what it is* (with the imperfect *τί ἦν* for the equivalent *τί ἐστι*) formally replaces the particular mode of predicational being in expressions of the form *being A*. It replaces, in other words, the being designated by the dative *A* in phrases of the form *τὸ A εἶναι*.[4] Because in the case of Callias human is what he is, his being human is equivalent to his being what he is—*τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι* equivalent to *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*.[5]

In a sense, therefore, *being what it is*—*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*—is a combination of the first two concepts; it represents formally the definitional essence of something's categorial essence. If, as we have just seen, a human is what Callias is, then (1) *being a human*—*τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*—constitutes the material mode, and (2) *being what he is*—*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*—the formal mode, of what it is for him to be that *what*. This is why I have rendered *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* as something's *being what it is;* its logos would reveal what it is for that thing to be what it is. It would not be altogether frivolous to call something's *τί ἦν εἶναι* its essential essence.

I have suggested that something's being what it is—*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*—is a special instance of something's being some A—*τὸ A εἶναι*—but one that is to be contrasted with the general sense of something's being A as representing simply the formal being of a thing. But that contrast is called into question by the ambiguity I have tried to expose in the notion of what something is—*τὸ τί ἐστι*. Insofar as our concept of what something is represents the broader or more generous of the two senses I distinguished earlier, we might simply understand something's being what it is—*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*—as a still more formal designation of something's being some A—*τὸ A εἶναι*. If white human is what a white human is, then a white human's being what it is—the *τί ἦν εἶναι* of a white human—will be being a white human—*τὸ λευκῷ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*.

But we may be stricter and insist that white human does not specify *what* a white human is; a white human is of course white, but being white, we might contend, is no part of *what* he is. What a white human is is simply (a) human, including, of course, all that is involved in that: animal, rational, live-bearing and the like—all the things, in other words,

that make up the definitional essence of being human. What Callias is is equally human and all that is involved in being a human—*ἄνθρωπος* and *τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*. Equally and in the same sense, neither white human nor what is involved in being a white human—neither *λευκὸς ἄνθρωπος* nor *τὸ λευκῷ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*—is any part of *what* he is.

Only if we choose to be stricter in this way will *something being what it is* capture the more refined sense of *what* that we encounter in the *Metaphysics*. Only then will *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* represent not simply the definitional essence of something's being (whatever that might happen to be) but the essence of that particular and specific mode of substantial being that constitutes something's being what it is in Aristotle's mature ontology.

3. The Unity of a Thing and What It Is

The sense in which a predicate stating what something is—a *τί ἐστι* predicate—may be thought of simply as stating the being of the description under which that thing is referred to can be seen from the beginning of the discussion in *Metaphysics* 7.6 that I mentioned earlier. Aristotle opens that discussion by asking whether each single thing—*ἑκαστόν*—and being what that thing is—its *τί ἦν εἶναι*—are the same or different; he goes on to argue that in the case of accidental being—something said to be this or that *κατὰ συμβεβηκός*—they would seem to be different. For example, "a white human is different from being a white human—*λευκὸς ἄνθρωπος ἕτερον καὶ τὸ λευκῷ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*" (*Metaphysics* 7.6, 1031a20–21). Before we recall Aristotle's argument for why this is the case, note that being a white human—*τὸ λευκῷ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*—is offered by Aristotle as an example of something's being what it is—*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*—as though white human—*λευκὸς ἄνθρωπος*—were, in some cases, indeed what something is—the *τί ἐστι* of that thing. In a sense, of course, it is; for it could be said to be what something is insofar as that thing is referred to under the description *white human,* for that is what the thing is qua white human.

But this is true only from the more relaxed perspective I described earlier. From the stricter perspective, and what is finally for Aristotle the more important perspective, what a white human is—its *τί ἐστι*—is simply

human, without the further and accidental determination *white.* From this more important perspective, being a white human is not being what something is, not really a *τί ἦν εἶναι* at all, since being a white human is not really what something is, not really a *τί ἐστι*. On this understanding, white human is not what the person who is a white human is, even qua white human.

The ambiguity in the notion of what something is, revealed in the fact that in one sense white human may be said to be what a white human is, while in another only human should so be said, is critical to the progression of Aristotle's argument in this chapter. That argument, which we considered briefly in Chapter 4, is meant to show that in cases of a subject accidentally being this-or-that, the subject must be distinguishable from its being what it is: a white human, for example, distinguishable from his being a white human. To show that, Aristotle invokes the unity of a subject of which different beings are predicated under different descriptions, for each of which there is therefore (as we now can see) a different definitional essence. He argues that if we suppose the subject to be indistinguishable from any and all of these different definitional essences, the essences will in turn be indistinguishable from one another.

The argument is swift and simple (*Metaphysics* 7.6, 1031a19–28). Suppose a white man—Callias, say—were identical with his being a white man, identical, that is, with his essence as white man. But Callias the white man is also a man, and if a white man is identical with his being a white man, surely a man is identical with his being a man. The identities add up ineluctably: white man to white man's essence, white man to man, man to man's essence—and what follows is the identity of white man's essence and man's essence. But surely that is out of the question: out of the question that what it is to be a human should be the same as what it is to be a white human. Therefore the initial supposition that a white man is identical with being a white man must be wrong. And if someone objects to the move that goes from the identity of a white man and his essence to that of a man and his essence, arguing that one is only a *per accidens* identity, the other a *per se* identity, a small change will meet the objection. Callias, who is white, is also cultured. Here the argument runs through as smoothly as before, but immune to the objection, since both predications are accidental. And surely something's be-

ing white—*τὸ λευκῷ εἶναι*—is not identical to something's being cultured—*τὸ μουσικῷ εἶναι* (*Metaphysics* 7.6, 1031a27–28).

The claim here is that in cases of accidental being a subject and the definitional essence determined by the description under which that subject is referred to must be distinguishable. To make this claim is to say, for example, that *a threshold* is not identical with its *being a threshold*. Earlier we expressed this fact about accidental being differently when we said that that which is a threshold is independent of its being one. If we allow the identity of a subject and its definitional essence in such cases, I argued earlier, our understanding of being will be distorted. For we will be at a loss to account for the distinct and identifiably different predicational beings of a single individual subject. If a subject is always and in every case identical with its being, then if the subject is one, as indeed it is, the beings predicated of it must also be one, or if, as is clearly true, the subject's beings are many, there will be many individual subjects. So it cannot be true that a subject is always and in every case identical with its being. If it were, we would lose the distinction between and compossibility of (a) the unity and singularity of an individual subject, and (b) the diversity and plurality of its several beings. But we do not want such loss; as I put it earlier, that which is in Anaheim and is pale and is short and is thinking and is a philosopher is none other than the *single individual many-being subject Abrams*—most importantly, Abrams the human being.

This final remark should remind us that the difference between a subject and its being is exhibited only in cases of accidental being, such as being a threshold or a white human. A threshold is an accidental being, as we have seen, because that which is the threshold and its being a threshold exhibit merely an accidental unity; it is not by virtue of being a wooden beam that a wooden beam is in a position to be a threshold. Similarly a white human is accidental because it is not by virtue of being human that a human is white. A human being is human by virtue of himself, and his color is white by virtue of itself; but it is only by virtue of his color being white that a human being is white. I have claimed that this contrast between accidental being—being *κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς*—such as we find in a threshold or in a white human, and being in itself—being *καθ'αὑτὸ*—such as we find in a human being, is of central importance to the argument

of the *Metaphysics,* perhaps of even greater importance than the distinction between substance and being in the other categories.

Part of that importance emerges in the remainder of the chapter, for Aristotle goes on, in a difficult and recondite discussion, to argue that in the case of something that is what it is by virtue of itself—is *καθ'αὑτὸ*—a thing and that thing's being what it is—its *τί ἦν εἶναι*—are identical (*Metaphysics* 7.6, 1031a28–1032a5). I will not go into the complexities of this argument (interesting in part for what we might learn from it about the ontology of the Academy). For what I want to focus our attention on is simply the claim that in each such instance of being by virtue of itself there is an identity between a subject and that subject's being what it is, its *τί ἦν εἶναι*.

Recall that a definitional essence specifies what it is to be the being it defines. What Abrams is, therefore, is as much being human, what I've also described more elaborately as what it is essentially to be a human—*τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*—as it is a particular human—*ἄνθρωπος*; what she is accidentally is as much all the details of being governed by the concept of white human being—*τὸ λευκῷ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*—as it is *a* white human—*λευκὸς ἄνθρωπος*. Remembering this, we can understand that the argument of *Metaphysics* 7.6 concerns what I identified as one of the underlying issues of the ontology of the *Metaphysics*: the nature of the unity of a thing and its being. The chapter asks explicitly, is that unity one of identity? Aristotle first argues that in cases of accidental being there is no such identity of thing and being, and then argues that such identity *does* obtain in cases of being in itself. This identity is here asserted and shown by negative argument, but it is only finally explained in the analysis of activity that we have looked at in Book 9.

That analysis involves a critique of the theory that all being is a relation between an independent subject and its being. Such a theory, which I have called a relational theory of being, offers a reasonable account of accidental being, but it is basically misleading with respect to substance. For in substance there is no relation of a predicated being to a subject that can be identified independently of that being. Suppose there is a human who is pale and is in Anaheim and is able to laugh; to say this is to say that there are several instances of being—being pale, being in Anaheim, being able to laugh—all of which are predicates said accidentally

of an individual human as of a subject. But when I say, as I might, that that subject is a human, I have not in turn predicated human of an independent and independently identifiable subject. Being human is not said of a subject that underlies it—not said *καθ' ὑποκειμένου*—in the way in which being pale is. The thing that is said to be pale is a human being that is the subject of a predication attributing paleness to it, and that subject is at the same time also in Anaheim, witty, and slightly overweight. But what is said to be human is nothing other than a human being, and it is that human being actively being human that is the primary being, the *ousia*. Aristotle describes it as a particular (instance of) human being—*ὁ τὶς ἄνθρωπος*—Abrams, for example, but Abrams-qua-human. Substance, in other words, is the primary and paradigm mode of something being, by virtue of itself, what it is. It is this unity of being by virtue of itself that is argued for in *Metaphysics* 7.6 with respect to a subject and its essence, that is, a subject and that subject's being what it is: its *τί ἦν εἶναι*.

4. Substance and Essence

Various and loosely related facts about Aristotle's notions of essence have thus led us back to our earlier theme of the identity of subject and being in substance, and the distinction between per se being, of which substance is the paradigm instance, and accidental being, of which a threshold (a wooden beam being in a certain position) or a white animal (an animal being white) is an instance. We have, however, yet to address this central question: what kind of activity is it that Aristotle identifies with the being of substance, the activity somehow related to something's being what it is?

But before we answer that question, I want to consider one final question about Aristotle's notion of essence. Does what we have seen shed any light on the question of whether Aristotle is an essentialist, and specifically whether he believes in what has come to be called *Aristotelian Essentialism?* This question may not seem obviously relevant to our concern with the nature of the activity that Aristotle identifies with substance, but raising it will lead us in the right direction. It may moreover seem an odd question unless we recall that the phrase *Aristotelian*

Essentialism does not necessarily designate a theory of essence held by Aristotle. In what has come to be the standard terminology, Aristotelian Essentialism is, as one philosopher puts it, "the doctrine that some of the attributes of a thing (quite independently of the language in which the thing is referred to, if at all) may be essential to the thing, and others accidental."[6] We may think of this description as capturing a standard version of Aristotelian Essentialism without begging the question of whether Aristotle in fact holds such a view. If we wish, we may in fact put the question the other way around, and ask whether *Aristotelian Essentialism* does or does not refer to a theory of Aristotle's.[7]

What is at stake in this question is not whether Aristotle thinks some attributes of a thing are essential to their subject, but whether he thinks they are essential, as our definition of Aristotelian Essentialism puts it, "independently of the language in which the thing is referred to." It is that qualification that is critical to distinguishing what the author of the definition calls the "metaphysical jungle of Aristotelian Essentialism" from more benign theories of essence. It should not be hard to recognize that this qualification invokes something equivalent to what we have been terming the *description under which something is referred to,* and which we have identified with what follows Aristotle's *qua*. In this sense, a predicate that belongs to a threshold, for example, does not belong to it "independently of the language in which the thing is referred to" if it belongs to it only *qua threshold.* Here it is not so much the question of *language* that is important; what is important is the question of whether a subject may be said to have necessary attributes just by virtue of itself or only relative to some determination indicated by a referring phrase. Do any of the notions of essence at which we have looked reveal this kind of essentialism, what we might call, so as not to beg the question, Aristotelian-style Essentialism?[8]

Predicates that state *what something is* and thus express the being I have dubbed *categorial essence* seem indeed to be essential to the thing whose *what*—whose *τί ἐστι*—they express. But on the first and more generous understanding that we distinguished, although such predicates constitute a kind of essential being, they are not essential in the sense we have just called *Aristotelian.* For in the case of accidental predicates that on this understanding state what a subject is, they do so only

relative to some determination. It is qua walker that someone walking from Anaheim to Azusa is in this sense essentially a walker, qua white that the surface of my wall is essentially white.

It is only on the second understanding that some predicates might be thought essential to something independent of any particular determination. When *human* is understood as what a particular walker is—its *τί ἐστι*—that fact is not tied to any particular description of the thing that is walking, but is true of it under any description by which the subject is referred to. This is essentially the argument that we saw earlier in 7.1 of the *Metaphysics:* it is the human who happens to be walking or sitting that is the walker or the sitter, and it is a human that is what the walker or sitter is essentially.

A definitional essence, on the other hand, is always tied to some mode of being specified by the description under which the thing in question is referred to; for something's being this-or-that—*τὸ A εἶναι*—always represents the being involved in the subject's being this-or-that, that is, involved in its being the specified A. It is for this reason that I termed it "definitional essence," for it represents exactly the kind of analytical explication of a complex and infolded mode of being that definitions are thought, on some theories, to provide. It therefore represents the sense of "essence" that nonessentialists want to claim is the only legitimate sense.

Consider finally the third style of Aristotelian essence, something's *being what it is*—*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*. This notion of essence represents, I suggested, a definitional essence that takes as its definiendum what something is—its *τί ἐστι* being. It should thus exhibit the same features that we saw to be true of definitional essence in general, for on any understanding it constitutes the definitional essence of some mode of being of that thing. This fact should prove of interest in our thinking about Aristotelian-style Essentialism, for it should suggest that there is no notion for Aristotle of a thing's definitional essence that is not relative to some being or other of that thing.

But because definitional essence is linked to the being of which it is the definitional essence, something's being what it is will similarly be linked to what the thing is—its *τί ἦν εἶναι* linked to its *τί ἐστι*. To the degree, therefore, that we think of a subject's being what it is as representing the definitional essence of the stricter understanding of categorial essence, it

will constitute a mode of being essential to the subject ultimately independent of any particular determination possible to it.

We might then think of describing Aristotle's theory in this way: there is an element of true essentialism in Aristotle's view that emerges only when we understand his theory of substance. For it is only insofar as we attend to the stricter understanding of *what something is* that there will emerge a mode of definitional essence not linked to any referential determination of the subject other than that of its categorial essence, and this is its essence in a strong, that is, independent and not relative, sense.

This is an inviting description, and in many ways reasonable to offer. But it is difficult for several reasons to ascribe to Aristotle the view that the attributes of a subject may be essential to it independent of the being specified in referential determination. For one thing, it is not clear that Aristotle thinks of attributes in general as belonging to a subject neat rather than to a subject under some description or other that determines and identifies that subject.[9] The paradigmatic structure of predication on his view is not "*x* is G" where *x* is a bare and undetermined subject; it is "some (or every) (instance of) F is G," where F is some determinate being of the subject of which the being specified as G is in turn predicated. Ultimately and pre-eminently such being is that of substance: being human for example—*ἄνθρωπος*—or being what it is for something to be human—*τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*.

This fact about predication is at heart an ontological fact. There are for Aristotle no bare and undetermined subjects such as might be denoted by a sign of indetermination: X. Subjects of necessity exhibit determination; they constitute some this or that. For it is Aristotle's view, as we have seen in *Categories* 5 and in *Metaphysics* 7.3, that it is only the determinate being of substance that is able to afford the luxury of openness to further determination and is thus able to fulfill its characteristic role as subject. It is precisely because determinateness is a condition of further determinability that substances, as paradigmatic subjects, must have essences. There is therefore no being that is not determinate being, and no reference that is not relative to a determination of a subject. Therefore there can be no essential predication that is not in turn relative to such a determination.

It seems wrong, in any case, to say that the model of attributes *belonging* to a subject is appropriate, on Aristotle's view, in the most interesting

cases. The critical question that Aristotelian-style Essentialism asks is whether the attributes that belong to a subject may be distinguished into essential and nonessential. But for Aristotle it is only in cases of accidental being that attributes may be said in the first place to belong to a subject at all; belonging suggests the independence of subject and attribute. This fact is related to what we saw as the argument of *Metaphysics* 7.6; Aristotle there links accidental being to the nonidentity of subject and being, and argues correspondingly for the identity of a subject with its essence in the strong sense.

One might almost say, although it would clearly be hyperbole, that for Aristotle all *predication* is accidental. What one would mean by this is that insofar as predication is understood as this being said of that—*τὶ κατὰ τινός*, the saying one thing of *another,* it is in this sense accidental. Essential being—the being ultimately to be identified with substance—is not the predication of a being in relation to some other independent subject. That is why substance, as we learn early in the *Categories,* is not said of a substratum—*καθ'ὑποκειμένου* (*Categories* 5, 2a12).

On Aristotle's understanding, in other words, all instances of something *having an attribute,* of a predicate being said *of a subject*, are instances of accidental predication, whereas in the case of substantial predication, a different model is appropriate. For the model of a subject having a predicate is in effect the rejected platonic model of relational being. In both cases what we are presented with is a thing standing in some relation of belonging to its being. But Aristotle, as I have suggested, proposes a different ontology, an ontology in which substance is not a predicate to which the subject of its being stands in any relation. It may be, as I described the situation in an earlier context, a human who is laughing or who is pale or who has just left the outskirts of Anaheim; in each of these cases some being is said of a subject independently identifiable as an individual human. But the being that determines that subject as what it is—human—is not in this way said of an independent subject. For the subject that is human is not some other thing; it is just the human. And it is that subject being human—a human being what it is—that is the primary being of substance. This is what Aristotle characteristically designates with the carefully chosen expression *this particular human being—ὁ τὶς ἄνθρωπος*—this particular instance of being human. Insofar then as something's

being what it is—*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*—is conceptually linked to the being of substance—to *ousia*—a subject does not stand in any relation at all to being what that subject is, to its *τί ἦν εἶναι*; it just *is* it.

If then we are to understand properly the place of essence in Aristotle's ontology, we will need to think of the question of essence in terms other than those envisioned in the debates concerning Aristotelian-style Essentialism. Given that all properties are said of a subject only relative to some description under which the subject is referred to, and given that some cases of properties said of a subject are not cases of a property belonging to an independent subject, but are cases of an individual subject that *is* its being, the question that needs to be asked is this: are there some descriptions under which a subject is referred to—some among the subject's beings—that are privileged? The answer to that question is characteristically Aristotelian: from one point of view no, but from another yes.

No, in that any referring description can be articulated in terms of essential being, so that every being is, in a sense, the essence of some subject or other, that is, what some individual is under a certain description. We have already seen this fact; notice again, though, that unless it were true, one of the basic projects of the *Metaphysics* would not be coherent. For, as I have repeatedly noted, the argument of the *Metaphysics* depends upon the assertion that the nature of substance will clarify the nature of being in general. This assertion is in turn based upon the fact that being exhibits the unity of things said with reference to a single sense, so that all being is to be understood in light of the being of substance. And that fact, as we have seen and as is made clear as early as 7.1 of the *Metaphysics,* is in turn expressible as the fact that all being is in a sense something being what it is, *τί ἐστι* being. Every mode of being expresses what something is relative to a description, even though that description may in turn be true of substance only accidentally.

But the qualification tells us that this cannot be the whole story. For it is, as we have seen Aristotle argue, only substance that truly specifies what something is. While some descriptions, therefore, capture only the accidental being of a thing, others specify in some sense the thing itself—what *it* is—and are essential to it under the description that is its proper what-description. These descriptions and all modes of being that are

involved in the definitional essence of these descriptions are essential to the thing in the strong sense that essentialism attempts to capture.

For each description under which something can be referred to, there will be a definitional essence—a "something-or-other *εἶναι*." But not each of these will be an instance of what it is for something to be what it is—not each will be a *τί ἦν εἶναι*. There will be a *τί ἦν εἶναι* only of those descriptions that themselves specify what something is—descriptions that articulate the *τί ἐστι* of some thing. In one sense, again, every description does this. But in a stricter sense it is only instances of *substance* whose being properly counts as constituting a description stating what they are.

If we want to know more about Aristotle's essentialism, then, we will have to look to those sciences necessary to determining the definitional essences of substances; in other words, we will have to look, as Aristotle did, to the biological sciences. For it is in the being of animals (and the natural bodies that compose them) in contrast to that of artifacts that, as I have argued, the simple unity of substance is exemplified. But we can say this much: all predication for Aristotle is of a subject under some description or other, and the attribution to Aristotle of any essentialist view that denies that fact is misleading. But for Aristotle, this is not the same as saying that all predication is *de dicto,* none *de re.* For paradigmatic subjects are simply things like *this instance of being human,* and such a subject is necessarily human not because being human is an attribute that necessarily attaches to *it,* as to some naked subject, but because the necessity of being human is, as it were, built into its very subjecthood.

On this view, Aristotle's essentialism, in contrast to Aristotelian-style Essentialism, is not primarily a theory concerning properties at all, as essence is not so much for Aristotle a matter of predicates as of subjects. It is a matter not of a predicate being said one way or another of a subject, but of the necessary constitution of subjects, a constitution that is founded on the unique suitability of substance to serve as ultimate subject. For it is, as we have repeatedly seen, only what exhibits the thorough determination of substance that is empowered to exhibit the determinability necessary to being a subject.

If we do wish to think about essentialism in predicational terms, we will have to think further about what I have here called the definitional

essences of these substantial modes of determination. We will have to look, as Aristotle did, to the biological sciences, and to the kind of being whose essential activity is such that to lose it is to die. In this way, the analysis of animate being and what it revealed in Chapter 4 concerning the relation of matter and form in animate life proves important. Activity and substance are connected by the very notion of a substance's being what it is, the activity most paradigmatically revealed in the being of living organisms. Here, as so often, the conceptual paths of Aristotelian thought lead us to those paradigmatic substances, animals, as they act out the natural and necessary structures and processes of their essential lives.

5. The Activity of Essence

Now we can turn to the question of the relation between substance and activity. The exact nature of this relation is one that we promised eventually to consider at the beginning of Chapter 5, and which has been at the edge of much of our discussion until now. But I can imagine two cognate versions of this uncertainty; so here are two questions, closely related to one another, about the relation between substance and activity.

The first of them has arisen repeatedly in our discussion, although rarely in an explicit form. Recall that in the analysis of substance as activity, we repeatedly invoked Aristotle's distinction between first- and second-level realization. We thought that speaking Romanian in the sense of being able to speak Romanian is a first-level realization; the realization of that ability in the act of actually engaging in conversation with a friend in Romanian is a second-level realization. First question: is the activity with which Aristotle identifies substance best understood as a first- or as a second-level realization? If it is true that on Aristotle's view animals are paradigmatic instances of substance, then we want to know this about the activity of substance: is it (a) being the kind of thing that does what a living being does, or is it (b) doing what a living being does in an active way? Is it, in other words, like having a command of Romanian and thus being able to speak Romanian, or like giving a speech in Romanian and thus actively speaking Romanian?

The second question, to which I have also alluded earlier, is closely related. I have mentioned that living beings engage in several activities in doing the things that they characteristically do and thus being the substances they are. So the second question is this: with which of these characteristic activities, from among the activities thus exhibited by a substance, or with which class of activities, is its substantial being to be identified? And how are these activities related to the activity of something being what it is? To put the question more succinctly: which of these activities constitutes the activity in terms of which Aristotle means to define substance?

It is obvious how the first question could arise, and it might be fruitful to consider its origin before considering any answer. Think again about Aristotle's identification of substance with activity. If animals are indeed paradigm instances of substance—that is, if their being is the paradigm mode of the being we call *ousia*—then we may want to think of substance as importantly like soul. For the soul is characterized by Aristotle as the form and essence of an animal (*De Anima* 2.1, 412a7–8). But it is also true that the soul is a mode of realization—the realization, as Aristotle puts it, of a natural body able to be alive (*De Anima* 2.1, 412b27–28)—and we have seen realization characteristically connected with activity. So these facts might be thought to confirm our belief in Aristotle's identification of substance and activity.

But someone might object to this sense of confirmation by noting that Aristotle does not define soul as a type of activity—of *energeia*—but as a type of realization—of what we have seen referred to as *entelechy*—*ἐντελέχεια*. His definition, therefore, may suggest not activity but a developed state of being, and to identify such a state of being with activity would seem to beg the very question at issue. And without such identification, where is the confirmation of any larger claim about the relation between substance and activity?

It is true but not a sufficient response to this concern to observe that for some purposes *energeia* and *ἐντελέχεια* are functionally equivalent. It is true because, as I have suggested, *ἐντελέχεια* should often be read as a gloss upon and extended sense of *energeia;* it signifies that *energeia* proper is a mode of activity that, because it is its own end, is

complete—ἐντελής—and is thus unlike motion, which is an activity that is incomplete—ἀτελής. To suppose otherwise is to suppose that the only interesting contrast to the kinetic is the static, whereas Aristotle's project is precisely to reveal as a more apposite contrast that between the kinetic and the perfectly energetic; this was the theme of Chapter 2.

But it is not a sufficient response, because it points to a deeper complication, and that deeper complication gives rise to the question I am posing. What is stressed in the early chapters of *De Anima* 2 is that ἐντελέχεια as a type of realization may signify two quite different levels. Indeed the definition of soul as realization is developed directly in the context of a distinction between these levels. This distinction, at work everywhere in Aristotle's thinking but particularly critical to the analysis of soul and the structures of animate life in general, is the distinction we have already looked at in some detail: the distinction between first- and second-level realization, between an achieved dispositional ability for activity and the exercise of that ability in the form of activity. The question then is this: if substance is identified with activity, and activity is understood as a kind of realization, is substance to be thought of as first- or second-level realization? Is it to be thought of, in other words, on the model of ability or on the model of the exercise of ability? On the model of a mere capacity, or of a capacity in operation? And that is the question I have proposed we consider.

It is not difficult to predict the arguments on either side of this question. On the one hand, the critical text at the end of Book 8 of the *Metaphysics,* central in earlier moments of our argument, identifies the activity that substance is said to be with form. But animals are the paradigm of substances, whose form is their soul, and the soul is a mode of first realization. It seems to follow that substantial activity must be understood that way as well. The activity of substance is therefore an active structure of ability for further activity.

The analysis of activity in Book 9, however, points in the other direction. For it reads the relationship between ability and activity, which is meant to explain the unity of matter and form, as a relationship between first- and second-level realization, that is, between an ability (which is the realization of a prior potency) and the exercise of such an ability. We should therefore read our master text from *Metaphysics* 9.6—"as sub-

stance in relation to some matter"—to mean "as some mode of second-level realization—activity—in relation to something analogous to first-level realization—ability." On this view, substance is the activity of an ability's exercise; it is a capacity in active operation, the operation, as I have suggested, of something being what it is. Which of these two answers should we endorse as the correct response to our question?

The right answer is *neither;* and that is true not because there is a better answer, but because the question I have posed is fundamentally misconceived. It is wrong to ask whether the activity of something being what it is is first- or second-level realization, because with respect to that activity there is no such distinction. The activity of being human, for example, is fully realized by any individual human at all, simply by virtue of his existence. And in general, the defining activity of any substance, as the substance's being what it is, is fully realized in that being and is so in the way that thinking, for example, is realized not simply in the ability to think, but in the active exercise of thinking, the activity that Aristotle calls *θεωρία*.

In this respect, to be sure, substance may be said to be more like second-level realization than like first, more, in other words, like the activity of seeing than like being able to see. But this way of speaking will be misleading in suggesting that substantial activity is to be understood *only* as second-level realization. In the activity of seeing, however, the ability to see is still present, as the ability to think is in the activity of thinking; indeed those abilities are in their exercise most fully present. Activities such as seeing and thinking, activities to which Aristotle applies the term *energeia* in its strictest sense, are as activities the most complete expressions of their abilities. Seeing, after all, just *is* being able to see in operation and therefore most fully active. It will therefore be misleading to characterize substance as a mode of second-level realization if by that characterization we are led to suppose that it is not at the same time a first-level realization.

What I have just said is, to be sure, true both about activity in general and about the specific activity that I am suggesting Aristotle identifies with something being what it is. But there is an important difference between the general case and this specific mode of activity, a difference that is the source of a further concern. One of the obvious facts about abilities and their exercise in general is that ability need not be realized. (It is part

of the campaign against the Megarians—the people Aristotle remembers as having thought that it is only when one is doing something that he is able to, and when he is not doing it he is not able to—it is part of the campaign against these people to insist, as Aristotle regularly does, that a subject may exhibit an ability even when it is not actively engaged in the exercise of that ability (*Metaphysics* 9.3, 1046b29–30). It has the ability as a dispositional state, but does not actively exercise it: "having, but not exercising," as Aristotle puts it: *ἔχειν μὴ ἐνεργεῖν δέ* (*De Anima* 2.5, 417a31–417b1).

But with regard to the activity that Aristotle identifies with substance, a Megarian would, as it were, be correct. For there is nothing that we would describe as having the ability to be human—the power, that is, to act as humans characteristically act—that is not at the same moment actively being human. Everything that has the power to be human is human. Here, therefore, lapsing into inactivity is a more radical lapse than any mere closing of the eyes or failure to contemplate actively the Pythagorean theorem. Strictly speaking, there is no such *lapse;* there is only death. For being human, there is no such ambiguity as there is for seeing between having sight and actively exercising that sight, such that a dead human might still be said to be able to be human as someone with his eyes closed might still be said to be able to see. As Aristotle puts it, paradoxically but understandably, "a dead human is not a human" (*De Interpretione* 1.11, 21a23).

As we saw earlier, there is a sense, revealed in Aristotle's embryology, in which the menses (or as we would say, the egg) may be said to be capable of becoming but not actively being a human. For on Aristotle's theory of generation, the menses is the matter out of which the embryo, and therefore mediately the animal itself, is generated (*Generation of Animals* 1.19, 727b31). But to suppose that this fact counters what I have just said is to confuse matter in the process of the generation of a human with the proximate matter that is a human's living body. Alexander, as we saw, makes this very mistake in his explanation of our master text, and in doing so subverts the force of Aristotle's argument by thinking of ability and activity on exactly the wrong model, on the model of becoming rather than of being.[10]

These considerations show how wrong it would be to think of something being what it is as first-level realization. But they should also sug-

gest to us the infelicity of thinking of such being in terms of first- and second-level realization at all. For where ability and exercise are always and of necessity together, the distinction itself is revealed to be otiose. A substance is throughout its career simply and actively what it is.

There is a different sense in which we may want to say that a human merely has the ability to be human, and it will help us answer our second question. This is the sense in which someone may be human and yet not be realizing those activities that are distinctively human. Indeed, a person may not even have realized the rude capacities for developed dispositional abilities characteristic of being human; he may not yet, for example, have learned to speak. Or indeed he may never learn to do so; death in infancy is still the death of a human. But what this fact shows is that because substances are always actively being what they are, *being what they are* is not identical with any collection of these component activities, the capacities for which may or may not be fully realized.

Here, then, is another aspect of how we are to think of the being of substance with respect to first- and second-level realization, and it is an important one. The activity of a substance's *being what it is* (most paradigmatically a living being of such-and-such a specific sort) includes its being some complex of abilities or capacities for the activities as well as for the further capacities characteristic of that substance. These abilities, however, need not be realized for the substance actively to be what it is. For the activities that make up a substance's nature are distinct from the activity of the substance's being that nature, even though Aristotle models the latter and more subtle notion upon the former and more obvious one.

The fact that the activity of a substance's being what it is may consist of its exhibiting certain abilities rests upon features characteristic of such principles of being as ability and activity. We may recall some of these features by recalling the argument of *Metaphysics* 7.6 that we discussed earlier in this chapter. There we noted how important it was to be able to maintain the distinction between and compossibility of the unity and singularity of an individual thing and the diversity and plurality of its several beings. This inversion of the more conventional problem of the one and the many, central to the thinking of both Plato and Aristotle, is equally applicable to entities such as activities. When a builder is

building, the activity in which she is engaged may, as we earlier noted, be thought of either as a motion or as an activity, depending upon whether we consider it in relation to the house that is its product or to the art of building of which it is an exercise. If I walk from the Anaheim City Hall to Disneyland, my walking might be thought of as a journey to a goal and thus a motion, but it might also be seen simply as an instance of strolling, a modest but authentic activity. In either case it will be a series of motions that make up a motion like a journey and an activity like a stroll; in either case, I move this foot in front of that, and then the other in front of the first, thus proceeding down Oak Street to Clementine, then on to West Broadway and off we go. So even when it is thought of as an activity, walking will consist of several motions.

This is equally true in the most central activities of an animal's life, those activities that constitute the essential exercise of its nature. For these activities consist of other activities and of motions, both in detail and globally; seeing, for example, is made up of this and that motion.[11] What is perhaps more important is that the global activity that is a substance's being what it is will in turn consist of those very activities that constitute the essential exercise of its nature and are, as it were, the material content of its being. And that being, as I earlier argued, may at any given moment be manifest only as capacities for those activities.

This is in brief the answer to the question I posed at the beginning of Chapter 5. There is, as we have seen, an interesting story to be told about why activities constitute the privileged modes of being that make up the content of substantial natures. But in addition, activity provides for Aristotle the model in terms of which to think of the most abstract mode of the being of substances, that being by which substances are whatever it is they are: being human, for instance. It too is an activity.

Similarly, as the organized proximate matter of an animal's body is the instrument for the various activities that constitute the essential exercise of its nature, so matter is the site of capacity for the substantial activity of a thing's being what it is. The matter in this case is, as we have repeatedly seen, the substance itself. As the seeing eye sees, and in so doing exercises its power to see, so the human being is human, and in so being is exercising its power to be human. It is, as I have repeatedly urged, the human being itself that is being human, and this is how the

relation of power to activity is mirrored in the relation of substantial matter to substantial form, of a substantial entity to its being. Thus *Metaphysics* 9.6: activity is "in some cases as substance to a certain matter."

It is not simply, therefore, that different activities make up and determine the nature of any given species of substantial being. For even healthy and normal members of a given species may not exercise these activities and still actively be the substantial beings they are. Indeed, the degree to which an instance of some given substance—an animal of one sort or another, say—engages in activities common or indeed central to the life form of that animal may differ from that of another animal or from that of itself at a different time, and yet we are steadfast in referring to them all as equally exemplifications of being that animal.

> It appears that substance does not admit of the more or less. I mean . . . that any given substance is not said to be more or less than what it exactly is. For example, if the substance in question is *human being,* nothing is more or less human either than itself or than another. For one human being is not more human than another, as it is with white, where one thing can be whiter than another. (*Categories* 5, 3b33–4a1)

So if we are to understand Aristotle's identification of substance with activity, it is not simply that we need to be diligent in not confusing activity proper with motion, even when that confusion is the subtle one of confusing substance with the development of a substantial nature. What is equally important is that we resist thinking of this activity as formally equivalent to the abilities and activities that make up the determinate nature of any given substance, and the fact that these activities are the very models of activity in terms of which Aristotle finally understands the being of substance does not make this less true. Perceiving, reproducing, thinking—engaging in the variety of modes of activity that make up animate life—these are all in their way activities, and they can make up the determinate essence of any given substance. But they are not the activities to which Aristotle refers when he identifies substance and activity, for they characterize substance both in the mode of ability and in that of active exercise.

There is, however, an activity of being that is not formally equivalent to any of these determinate capacities and activities that constitute the specific nature of particular individual substances, although it is figured by them. It is this activity of a thing being what it is—expressed in its actively being able both to act and to be acted upon in ways characteristic of its nature, and in its actively *exercising* those capacities—it is this *being what it is* that is its substance being, its *ousia*. An instance of such being is being human—*τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*—as exemplified by any particular human being: *ὁ τὶς ἄνθρωπος*—this very one: Raskin, for example, or McCorquodale or Abrams—but Raskin, McCorquodale, and Abrams qua human.

CHAPTER 7

The First Mover

In Aristotle's ontology, I have argued, substance is the activity of something's being what it is, an activity modeled on the lesser activities that together constitute the being of a substantial individual: a horse and human being are the examples Aristotle offers. This activity, unlike those lesser more complex activities, exhibits no distinction between first and second actuality. Human beings go to sleep, rest their eyes, and sit in silence; they maintain a vast array of capacities about any one of which it makes sense to ask at any moment whether it is dormant or active. But being human itself neither sleeps nor slumbers. Death is its only rest, a death that extinguishes everything, capacities and their realizations alike, a death that annihilates both rest and activity. A moment of substance is actively and immutably what it is until it ceases to be anything at all.

1. The First Substance of *Metaphysics* 12

This articulation of the nature of substance as essential and active being, an articulation made possible through the understanding of being as *energeia,* is, as I have encouraged us to remember, part of a larger enterprise. In Book 4 of the *Metaphysics* and again at the beginning of

Book 7, Aristotle announces this enterprise. It consists in the elaboration of a general ontology, a general ontology that is to be realized by a theory of substance. That the one can be realized by the other—a general ontology by a theory of substance—is possible because (a) the unity of being is a unity of things said in reference to a single sense, and (b) that single sense is exemplified in the being of substance.

But there are two things that this might mean. It might mean that a theory of being is made possible by the development of a general theory of substance, an account, that is, of the being of substance in general. We can locate Aristotle's development of such an account of substance in Books 7, 8, and 9 of the *Metaphysics.* This is the understanding on which I have been proceeding. On such an understanding, the central work of the *Metaphysics* is accomplished between Books 4 and 9; the other books will then be seen as addenda or prolegomena, the first several books introductory by way of history and methodology, the later as broadly ancillary, Book 12 in particular as a treatise in philosophical theology.

But alternatively, a theory of substance might be thought to do its work primarily by a consideration of substance's most exemplary case; on such a reading, it is the middle books that are subordinate, preparing the way for an understanding that may be thought to reach completion only in Book 12, with Aristotle's account of the divine. We are prepared for this second possibility when we read in the opening chapter of Book 6 that

> if there is not some other substance in addition to those formed by nature, then natural science will be the first science. But if there is some unmoving substance, [the study of] this will be prior and will be first philosophy, and will be universal in this way, because first. And it will belong to this [discipline] to study being qua being, both what it is and the attributes that belong to it qua being. (*Metaphysics* 6.1, 1026a27–32)

Metaphysics 12 seems to constitute the fulfillment of the theoretical pledge here given by Aristotle. Pledge and fulfillment alike invoke the generality of the superlative; so the words *universal because first* come to assure us that the particular nature of a divine substance will not interfere with, indeed will make possible, its general explanatory function.

They serve as well to remind us that that explanatory function operates not because divine substance *is* being qua being—a more serious version of the misconception of which I spoke much earlier that mistakenly identifies *substance* and *being qua being*—but because of whatever features allow it to serve as the principle of being in general.

This understanding, according to which Aristotle's first philosophy constitutes a general ontology of being by providing a particular ontology of divine unmoved substance, has seemed inspiring to some readers. But to others it feels difficult, not least because it seems so at odds with the robust naturalism characteristic of Aristotle's thought. More to the point, it seems at odds with the thought that the account of substance and being seems somehow complete by the end of Book 9. We could seek to relieve this sense of incongruity in several ways. Perhaps the easiest is to adopt the technique of dealing with incongruity by disqualifying in one way or another some of the items that are incongruous. Given the weight of the argument in Books 4, 7, 8, and 9, this will mean questioning the authenticity of Book 6 and the worrisome parts of Book 12. We could think of them either as the additions of a later platonizing hand or, as some scholars have seen them, as the residual juvenilia of a younger and not-yet-unplatonized Aristotle.[1]

More simply, we could choose to excise only the offending remarks of Book 6, and see Book 12 as an independent and separate enterprise. We could think of it this way: after Aristotle has completed the essentials of an analysis of substance and thus of being generally, he turns in Book 12 away from a consideration of substance in general to the consideration of a particular and specific kind of substance, unmoved substance, which he identifies (a) with the divine and (b) with mind. The concerns of this discussion are other than those of the general ontological enterprise of the *Metaphysics;* they are theological in nature, and concern being in general only insofar as God is revealed to be the source of the existence and motion of the cosmos as a whole.

These familiar strategies, none without merit, all seem to me nevertheless unwise. I suggest rather that Book 12 is part of the general enterprise of the *Metaphysics* as a whole and not incongruous with the argument of Books 7, 8, and 9. It is a development of that argument, or better, it is an articulation of that argument in a different register. Think then of

the relationship of substance to being in general as mirrored in the relationship between the unmoved substance of *Metaphysics* 12 and substance itself. This is the sense in which divine substance is introduced as an explanation of the world—not as an explanation of the existence of the world, but as an explanation of its being. It is introduced, in other words, as a model of substance and therefore transitively as the principle of being in general.[2]

But when so introduced, it is seen, precisely because it is seen as the first principle of being, as divine. This is what I mean by Book 12's offering the argument of the central books *in a different register;* it is the register of theology. But I want to urge here a different understanding of the theological force of these later discussions. Instead of imagining ourselves discovering what is divine and then coming to see it as the principle of being—of *ousia*—think instead of coming to see that which is the principle of being as, just because it is the principle of being, divine. There are other characteristics of the divine discussed in Book 12 of the *Metaphysics* that are not so directly associated with the argument of its earlier books, but to which the same strategy of analysis, I think, applies. Rather than attributing the role of first mover to divinity, think instead of conferring divine status on that which is revealed to be the world's motive principle; instead of imagining a cardinal feature of god as awareness, think instead of coming to see the principle of the awareness that we have of the world—of the consciousness that we know as *nous*—as for that very reason being divine.

A view of this sort is independent of the historical question of whether Aristotle intended Book 12 to be a part of the central argument I have suggested is contained in the other books of the *Metaphysics.* It allows as possible and consistent with this view that Aristotle intended Book 12 as an independent treatise. An appealing reading is that much of Book 12 is an exercise in philosophical cosmology, concerned to undermine theories according to which the universe had a beginning in time, and to reveal the conditions of the world's eternity; so it was read by many medieval thinkers. And it is equally possible that the book or parts of it make up a treatise in philosophical theology. But such readings do not preclude Aristotle's having seen as divine that which is a principle of being, which is the central thought I want to elicit from Book 12. Nor do they

preclude the possibility of his having appended Book 12 to other of his treatises in first philosophy, or of his having come to see it as a viable part of some original version of the *Metaphysics.* In any case the argument I am here making does not concern Aristotle's compositional strategies and history; it concerns the logical and conceptual relation of the divine being of Book 12 of the *Metaphysics* to the substance whose nature is articulated in Books 4 through 9.

Later I will say more about how the divine being of Book 12 can be considered the principle of substance and thus of being, and more about what it means to think of that connection in a theological register, a thinking by which I hope to relieve the sense of incongruity of which I spoke. But first I want to attend to the fact that the divine in Book 12 is so characteristically introduced, as I have here introduced it, as *unmoved* substance, and to the coordinate fact that a major concern of Book 12 is to show how divine being is the principle both of the being and of *the motion* of the world. I want, in other words, to direct our attention back to motion—back to becoming and to change—and to its connection with activity. Specifically, I want to look at what Aristotle invokes as the principle of change in the natural world, what he calls the first mover.

2. The Divine Mover

The view that divine being is the formal principle of substance and therefore of being in general is compatible with the view that the divine explains the movements of the universe, precisely insofar as *energeia* is the principle both of being and of motion. It would be wrong therefore to think of Book 12 as meant merely to explain the world's motion. In his introduction to a widely read edition of the *Metaphysics,* one scholar suggests that

> while ZH [Books 7 and 8] are occupied mainly with the logical analysis of sensible substance into form and matter, L [Book 12] is concerned rather with a causal explanation of the existence of sensible things, and therefore brings in at an early stage and constantly insists on the necessity of a motive cause as well. . . . It thus prepares the way for the proof of the necessity of a single motive cause of the universe.[3]

But while *Metaphysics* 12 is indeed concerned with a causal explanation of sensible things, this concern is not with a causal explanation of their existence. It is rather with the kind of causal explanation that is achieved by revealing the formal principle of sensible substance, and such explanation perforce involves explaining the being of nature in motion.

To reveal substance as the principle of being is, for Aristotle, to reveal a principle of activity. For sensible substance, this activity is on the one hand the structured activity of substance's environment: the ordered motions of cosmic being, the cycles of day and night and of seasons and of years in which substance is able to flourish. And it is paradigmatically the activity of animate being, made up, as we have seen, of the activities characteristic of the lives of complex organisms. It may be, for example, the living of a representative human life, for this is, as we have seen, being human—*τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*. Such activity, viewed from one perspective, is *energeia* in contrast to *kinesis.* But it consists, as we have also seen, of a complex series of motions, or of activities that in turn consist of motions, and that together constitute the motions and cycles of a characteristically human life. Eating, perceiving, moving, falling asleep and waking, and thinking are merely some of the more obvious of such motions. And it may, from another perspective, be thought itself to constitute a single motion: the waxing and waning career of an animal life that is bounded by birth and death. Taken together, these motions—the global motion of the developmental history of an animal's life cycle and the constituent essential motions that make up its life history—are the basic motions to which Aristotle refers when he identifies natural beings as those beings that contain within themselves a principle of motion and rest (*Physics* 2.1, 192b14–23).

It is motions of this sort that divine being, as the principle of general cosmic motion, may be said to explain. The formal principle that links the first mover to the specific activities of human being is that of the sun's motion along the ecliptic, and this principle is said primarily to explain generation and decay (*Metaphysics* 12.5, 1071a15; *On Generation and Corruption,* 2.10, 336a32–336b16). Such explanation is thus fundamentally an explanation of the cycles of birth, growth, flourishing, and death of an animal and of the motions associated with those cycles, both as

part of the animal's nature and by the accidence of what befalls the animal in the course of its life.

It is clear that these motions, and the celestial motions of the spheres as well, are in Aristotle's thought in Book 12 when the first principle, described by Aristotle as the necessary beauty of the active, is introduced in its role as mover and principle of motion. Here is how Aristotle argues: "Since there is something that moves while itself being unmoved and that is activity *(energeia),* this something can in no way be other than it is. . . . Therefore such a being necessarily exists, and qua necessary is good and beautiful, and is thus a principle. *ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἄρα ἐστὶν ὄν*: *καὶ ᾗ ἀνάγκη*, *καλῶς*, *καὶ οὕτως ἀρχή*" (*Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072b4–11). It is as unmoved substance that this being is the principle of all motion and of all being as well, and "on such a principle depend the heavens and all of nature. *ἐκ τοιαύτης ἄρα ἀρχῆς ἤρτηται ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ φύσις*" (*Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072b14).

It remains to be understood, however, what it means to describe this first principle of the motion of the cosmos—a principle of ordered change revealed in the activity of sensible substance and its environ—as itself unmoved. What is the nature of a first divine substance at once unmoved and a principle of movement?

To answer that question, we need to look again at works of Aristotle's that are more explicit in their account of motion, specifically at the *Physics* and at Aristotle's discussion in his treatise on heavenly motion and being, the treatise *On the Heavens*—the *De Caelo.* In the course of my argument, which will lead us through these works and Book 12 of the *Metaphysics,* I hope to discover a common but developing thought, a thought that increasingly reveals the primacy of *energeia* in Aristotle's understanding of what it means to be first and divine mover. This community of thought, I suggest, will be revealed if we follow what seems to be the development in these works of Aristotle's thinking on the principles of motion. I will call into question the standard view, according to which Aristotle discovers, in the course of these discussions, the fact that the principle of motion must be unmoved; I suggest rather that what we see developing in these works is an awareness of the explanatory priority of activity to motion. What is revealed is the divinity of *energeia.*

3. The Question of the First Mover

I begin with Aristotle's lectures on the principles of nature and change, the book we now call the *Physics*. Near the end of these lectures, Aristotle turns to this question: is motion—that is to say, change—perpetual? The turn is not a surprising one. The subject of Aristotle's lectures is nature's essential capacity for change, so that it would be natural to ask whether that change may itself be subject to change, and may have arisen from or be destined for conversion into rest. Given furthermore that change has been revealed to involve time, it is not surprising that this question be framed in terms that ask whether motion is everlasting or, given that change is at once a sign of life and an emblem of mortality, that it inquire whether motion is "a deathless and unceasing property of what is, a kind of life for everything constituted by nature" (*Physics* 8.1, 250b14). But what may seem surprising is that the turn should lead us to a theory of an unmoved mover—an unchanging first principle and source of change. Why should a treatise on motion end with a discussion of a being that is itself unmoving?

It is understandable that the nature of motion invites explanation; its definition is problematic, as Aristotle's predecessors knew and as Aristotle, we have witnessed in detail, finds it: "While difficult to visualize, still possible to be: *χαλεπὴν μὲν ἰδεῖν ἐνδεχομένην δ' εἶναι*" (*Physics* 3.2, 202a2). But the analysis of motion in terms of activity still provides, as we have seen, the gist of such an explanation, and in addition, particular motions, like other local phenomena, can be explained locally, especially with reference to particular animals. For not only does Aristotle characterize animals as paradigmatic substances, he also characterizes them—a characterization that is part of his description of their being animals—as self-movers, a phenomenon to which we will shortly find ourselves returning.

It is not, however, simply motion, but the eternity and uniformity of motion—something argued for in the opening chapters of the *Physics*—that requires, according to Aristotle, a principle that is itself not in motion (*Physics* 8.6, 259a10–12). So we need not feel that the argument is somehow otiose. Still, however, it is an argument that might seem more

at home in a separate treatise superordinate to the *Physics.* It is as though Book 8 were part of a treatise on metaphysics rather than physics.

Perhaps we should not find even this move odd; think of the very book we're discussing, *Metaphysics* 12, or of Book 3 of the *De Anima.* In these discussions, we observe the same turn of argument: an appeal to a divine principle that may seem more appropriate to a superordinate science. But there appears still to be this difference: in the *Metaphysics,* the discussion of the divine provides an account of a formal principle of the being of substance (and therefore of being in general) of which the divine is in fact an instance—paradigmatic, but still an instance. And in the *De Anima,* Book 3's divine faculty of thought—*νοῦς*—is still an instance—again, paradigmatic but still an instance—of life and consciousness. But what is noteworthy about the *Physics* is that the principle of motion is itself *not* in motion. There is, of course, no requirement that a principle of motion be in motion, any more than that the Form of the Large be large or the form of Plurality plural. But the fact that the first mover is unmoved still seems to mark an interesting difference between Aristotle's ontology and psychology on the one hand, and his theory of motion on the other. What the theory of motion seems to forgo is a paradigmatic principle, and we may wonder why this is so. Why is the first principle of motion not a divine self-mover, as the first principle of being is a divine substance?

4. The Emergence of an Unmoved First Mover

The turn in Aristotle's argument might occasion a further perplexity, rather like that occasioned by the very discussions of the *Metaphysics* and *De Anima* just mentioned. We may find ourselves bemused by what might seem in these texts Aristotle's too-ready abandonment of a naturalist metaphysics and too-easy adoption of a theology of explanation. Why, we may want to know, does he feel the need to introduce a separate divine thinker? The account of substance and being in the central books of the *Metaphysics* and the account of human life and thought in the *De Anima* as well seem quite complete without such an introduction. Just so the account of motion in the early books of the *Physics* seems satisfactory

in itself. Why then do we find the introduction at the end of the *Physics* of an unchanging and divine first mover?

To feel this question more forcefully, recall the picture of celestial motion that Aristotle draws in what appears to be an earlier work, the *De Caelo.* There is, according to this picture, an eternal mover embodied in the divine outermost sphere of the universe. This sphere moves with a uniform circular motion that is without beginning and without end. The divine and immortal motion that it exhibits is the source and principle of all lesser heavenly motions and therefore ultimately of all motion.

Here is a summary of this view that Aristotle offers at the beginning of Book 2 of the *De Caelo:*

> We may be well convinced that the ancient theories, above all those of our own tradition, are true, that there is something deathless and divine among those things that exhibit motion, exhibiting a motion of which there is no limit, but which is rather the limit of all other motions. For a limit is one of those things that encompass (*τῶν περιεχόντων ἐστί*) and this circular movement, being complete, encompasses motions that are incomplete and have limit and cessation. But it itself, having neither beginning nor end but continuing ceaselessly in infinite time, is the source of the beginning of some further motions and contains the cessation of others. Our ancestors assigned heaven and the upper region to the gods, believing it alone to be deathless, and our present discussion witnesses to the fact that it is indestructible and ungenerated, and that it suffers none of the ills of the mortal, and that it involves no effort, since it needs no force of necessity by which it may be prevented from following some other more natural path. (*De Caelo* 2.1, 284a2–16)[4]

Aristotle's view here may seem marked as an early moment in his thinking. Note the clear echoes of his predecessors throughout—the circular completeness of Parmenides (about which more later), the encompassing principles of Anaximander and Anaximines,[5] and, above all, the self-moving principle of motion found in Plato's *Phaedrus* (254C) and *Laws* (10, 895B). But it is a view with a simple power and attractive-

ness. We may then be moved to ask a further question: how are the views that we encounter in the *Physics* and in the *Metaphysics* related to this early view in the *De Caelo?*

Perhaps the most obvious way in which the first mover here described differs from that introduced in the *Physics* and described in the *Metaphysics* is this: the principle of the *De Caelo* is in motion, whereas the first mover of the *Physics* and *Metaphysics* is notoriously an unmoved mover. But this difference may be seen as the result of a deeper shift in Aristotle's views. In the *De Caelo,* the circular motion of the outermost sphere is natural to the ethereal body of which it is composed. It is therefore as self-explanatory as is the downward motion of earth or the upward motion of fire.[6] According to this early view, therefore, the motion of the celestial sphere is a form of self-motion. In the *De Caelo,* to be sure, celestial motion is self-motion only in the sense that it is self-explanatory. Since the first mover is none other than the first moved, the *primum mobile* of the outermost starry sphere of the heavens is its own natural source of motion, as well as the principle of all lesser motions. And such a view contrasts with that of the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics.* In these two works Aristotle no longer views the first motion as self-motion even in this attenuated sense. The motion of the outermost sphere is no longer self-explanatory, but is in need of causal explanation, and that explanation must be provided by an unmoved mover, a being that is separate from the first moving sphere and is the source of its motion and thus of all lesser motions. On this view, the first motion is not a self-motion, for mover and moved are distinguished and indeed actually separate.

Interpretations such as this form an attractive developmental reading of Aristotle's thinking. On this reading (setting aside speculation concerning what Aristotle may have argued in his lost works), there is a radical shift in Aristotle's thought. From the picture we see here given in the *De Caelo* of a divine celestial motive principle that is a species of self-motion and the principle of all lesser motions, Aristotle moves to the picture we are given in Book 8 of the *Physics,* and in an elaborated form in Book 12 of the *Metaphysics,* a picture of a separate unmoved first principle of motion. One commentator offers a clear expression of this developmental view in this summary of his discussion: "Thus the belief in an

unmoved first mover is not an early belief but Aristotle's last word on the subject; the *De Philosophia,* the *De Caelo,* the *Physics,* and the *Metaphysics* reveal the successive stages in the development of Aristotle's view."[7]

My aim in this chapter is to call that reading into question by recommending a different and more complex relationship among the representations in these three works of the divine as a principle of motion. For the unmoved mover of the *Physics* is in fact closer to the motive principle of the *De Caelo* than we take it to be. Conversely there is a more complicated relationship between Aristotle's account of the first mover in the *Physics* and his account of divine being in *Metaphysics* 12 than we characteristically suppose. On the reading I will propose, Aristotle's first mover remains a self-mover. For the unchanging mover of the *Physics* is the principle of the outermost heaven's motion, analogous to its soul, and the first motion that is the principle and source of natural change is the self-movement of that outermost heaven, the motion whose proximate cause is that principle or soul-analogue. Aristotle's account of the *Physics* differs from that of the *De Caelo* in the prominence it accords this principle as explanation of the heaven's self-movement, but there remain important continuities between the views in the *De Caelo* and in the *Physics.* The account of the first mover in the *Physics* and that of divine substance in the *Metaphysics* must in turn be carefully distinguished, for there is a difference between these accounts and a difference between the place that the first mover plays in the arguments of these two works. Part of my aim in this chapter will be to draw attention to these differences, for they derive from what we have seen to be Aristotle's emphasis on the priority of activity to motion—of *energeia* to *kinesis*—an emphasis that I have argued is central to the project of the *Metaphysics.* In one sense, then, I offer no more than a modest proposal for realignment: I want to invite us to see the *Physics* as closer to the *De Caelo* and as further from the *Metaphysics* than we are accustomed to do.

But in making that proposal I wish to redirect the terms in which we think about Aristotle's account of the divine principle of motion in these works and to reveal a continuity in their thought. There is a development in the course of Aristotle's discussions, but it is not the discovery that the principle of motion does not move; it is rather the more positive disclosure of the explanatory priority of activity to motion. What devel-

ops in Aristotle's description of the first principle of motion in the *De Caelo,* the *Physics,* and the *Metaphysics* is therefore his understanding of the sense in which the first mover constitutes a motive principle that is first, and that development is grounded in his understanding of activity—of *energeia*.

5. The First Mover and Self-Movers

According to the account I want to call into question, the argument of the *Physics* depends upon Aristotle's repudiating an earlier belief that the first motion is an instance of self-motion. It is tempting, if we accept this account, to see this repudiation as part of a larger rejection of the possibility of self-motion in general. For we might imagine Aristotle to be arguing that every putative case of self-motion can be analyzed into mover and moved. Such a general view can hardly be right; it would be surprising if Aristotle should come to deny overall the self-motion of living substances. For think how characteristically conservative Aristotle is with respect to commonly held beliefs that some perspective or other makes appear paradoxical, beliefs, for example, such as the existence of moral incontinence. And indeed a considerable body of commentary has shown that he does not thus deny self-motion in general.[8]

But the *Physics* does have rather discouraging things to say about the possibility of self-motion. It appears to argue that natural motion is not self-motion in any obvious sense, and what is more important, it appears, in the argument of Book 8, to deny the possibility of self-motion specifically with regard to the first unmoved mover. So we need first to consider what Aristotle actually says in *Physics* 8 about self-movers.

The first mention of self-movers occurs early in chapter 2, when Aristotle considers whether the existence of animate self-movers might constitute an argument against the eternity of motion. We can understand why it might be thought to do so. For it may happen with respect to such animate beings as we ourselves are that "when nothing is moving in us, but we are at rest, we nevertheless begin to move, the principle of such motion being in us and nothing outside doing the moving" (*Physics* 8.2, 252b18–21). But, Aristotle continues, "if it is possible for this to come about in an animal, what is to prevent it happening in the universe as a

whole? For if it comes about in the microcosm [of an animal], why not in the greater cosmos? And if in the cosmos, why not in the unlimited, if the unlimited is indeed capable of motion and rest as a whole?" (*Physics* 8.2, 252b25–28). And if it is possible for motion to have come into being sui generis from a universe at rest, then arguments for the eternity of motion have no purchase.

Aristotle denies the cogency of this reasoning, pointing out that it only appears to be true that nothing occasions an animal's motion; in fact, changes in the surrounding environment that encompasses it—its *περιέχον*—are responsible for the initiation of that motion (*Physics* 8.2, 253a15–17). This is a fact to which we will return in a moment. But for now, note the tenor of the argument. It concerns the question not of self-motion as such, but of the initiation of motion, of its coming into being. It is therefore concerned with the phenomenon of self-motion not as a principle of motion, but as a possible (but inappropriate) model, in the context of asking whether it is eternal, for motion's genesis—a model for motion as a whole having come into being.

At the same time, Aristotle's argument reinforces the reality of self-motion in the case of such beings as animals. This feature of the argument is made even clearer subsequently in the course of *Physics* 8, when, in a passage that we will examine momentarily, Aristotle assures his readers that "there are such beings that move themselves, namely living beings in the genus of animals" (*Physics* 8.6, 259b1–3).

The reference to self-motion in these texts makes understandable the subsequent repeated invocation of self-motion when Aristotle begins to unfold his argument for the necessity of a first mover. For the necessity of first movers is cast in terms of the possibility of them being self-movers. In chapter 5, Aristotle concludes an initial stage in the argument for a first mover by noting that "if everything in motion is moved by something, but the first mover is not moved by something else, it is necessary that it be moved by itself" (*Physics* 8.5, 256a19–21). A subsequent argument then concludes with these words: "Therefore according to this argument, whatever is in motion must be moved by something that moves itself, or must at some point lead back to such [a self-mover]" (*Physics* 8.5, 256b1–3). Later in the same chapter, we read that "it is therefore not necessary that whatever is moved be moved by something

else that is itself moved; the series will therefore come to an end. The first mover will therefore be moved either by something at rest, or it will move itself" (*Physics* 8.5, 257a26–28). It appears, therefore, that the argument for a first mover quite happily countenances the possibility of it being a self-mover.

In chapter 6 Aristotle summarizes his argument in these words:

> Positing that everything that is moved is moved by something, and that this is either unmoved or moved, and if moved is moved either by itself or by some other thing, and so on, we proceeded to conclude that the principle of what is moved is, on the one hand, of moving things, that which moves itself, but of all things, that which is unmoved, and we see clearly that there are such beings that move themselves, namely living beings in the genus of animals. (*Physics* 8.6, 259a29–259b2)[9]

He immediately adds, as we just noted, that such self-movers cannot serve as legitimate models for the possibility of motion as a whole coming into being *de novo.* Moreover, he proceeds to argue that self-movers of this sort—animals—cannot constitute the primary principle of motion needed to explain the eternity and continuity of change, for as we noted earlier, such self-movers are in fact moved by other moving agents, and therefore do not exhibit continuous self-motion (*Physics* 8.6, 259b7–25).

Note that this argument is specifically designed to show that because the soul is moved accidentally by the forces that move the body, it cannot be responsible for continuous motion. It is therefore not an argument against the explanatory power of such self-movers as would be capable of continuous self-motion. But a divine self-moving principle such as we find in the *De Caelo* is an instance of just such a mover, for it is not, as other self-movers are, subject to the causal agency of a surrounding environment—a *περιέχον*—for the initiation of its self-motion. Indeed it has no *περιέχον*—no surrounding environment—for it is the *περιέχον* (*De Caelo* 1.9, 278b23–25; 279a12–18). The subsequent claim that the first mover is not moved even accidentally may therefore not preclude a sense in which the self-moving outermost sphere constitutes precisely

such a first mover. If this is true, perhaps there is not as great a difference between the account of the *De Caelo* and that of the *Physics* as we had initially supposed.

6. The First Mover as Unmoved Mover

Surely, however, the self-motion of the first mover of the *Physics* is denied in Aristotle's repeated insistence that the first mover must be unmoved. It is indeed this fact that seems most sharply to distinguish the divine self-moving principle of the *De Caelo* from the first mover of the *Physics;* the former but not the latter is in motion. And isn't this distinction clear in the passage from *Physics* 8.6 that we have just noted, in which Aristotle appears to contrast the self-moving mediate principle of moving things with the unmoved principle of motion in general?

It is undeniable that in these several contexts and in numerous others, Aristotle characterizes the first mover of the *Physics* and *Metaphysics* alike as unmoved. But it does not follow from this fact alone that in these contexts his views contrast substantially with what we have seen in the *De Caelo.* For the *De Caelo*'s theory of a first self-moved principle is in fact more complex than our earlier description would indicate, and it is complex in ways that should blunt the force of the distinction between that work and the *Physics.*

The last section of Book 1 of the *De Caelo* is devoted to showing that there can be only one heaven and one world under it—only one *οὐρανός*, as Aristotle puts it.[10] The argument by which he shows this is ingenious. First he concedes that there might seem to be more than one world, given the distinction between the existence of a particular world (this one) and the form of a world in general. The notion of a form distinct from matter entails the possibility of more than one instance of that form (*De Caelo* 1.9, 278a13–17). But because the distinction rests on the possibility of a form instantiated in different matter, a plurality of worlds is possible only if there is matter other than the matter of this particular world, and there is none.

Aristotle asks us to imagine by analogy a single nose or a single human that possesses all the bones or flesh in existence. In such circumstances there could be only one nose or one human. So it is with the

world; for in fact our world contains all the matter that there is for a world (*De Caelo* 1.9, 278a25–27). Aristotle's argument is not that the concept of a world entails that there is only one world, as one might argue that the notion of a universe contains the notion of uniqueness; there could not be another world simply because there is nothing to make it out of. The extramundane poverty of matter on which this argument is based is expressed in Aristotle's remark that "the whole that is encompassed (*περιεχόμενον*) by the outermost circumference is necessarily composed of all natural and sensible body, for neither is there nor could there come to be any body outside the heaven" (*De Caelo* 1.9, 278b22–25). There ensues an argument for this claim. The argument itself is not of particular interest, but at its end Aristotle repeats the conclusion that "outside the heaven neither is there nor is it possible that there should come to be any bodily mass whatever," (*De Caelo* 1.9, 279a7–8) and further concludes that as a result there is "neither place nor void nor time outside" (*De Caelo* 1.9, 279a12–13). We might expect that the outermost circumference of the material world thus marks the limit of all being, and that beyond the divine self-moving sphere there is nothing. But in fact Aristotle continues in a different and somewhat surprising manner: "As a consequence, what is there (*τἀκεῖ*) is neither begotten in space, nor does time make it age; nor is there any change of any sort in any thing that lies beyond the outermost motion, but changeless and unaffected (*ἀναλλοίωτα καὶ ἀπαθῆ*), enjoying the best and most self-sufficient life, it continues through all ages (*διατελεῖ τὸν ἅπαντα αἰῶνα*)" (*De Caelo* 1.9, 279a17–18). The fact that the outermost circumference of the heaven is the farthest body at the edge of the universe does not therefore mean that it marks the limit of being, but only that it marks the limits of somatic being.

We might feel uncomfortable about this second stage of Aristotle's reasoning in relation to the first. Why, if there can be a specific being beyond the edge of our world that is immaterial, could there not as well be another world that was itself immaterial? One direction in which this question might take us is to a consideration of how place and time figure in the concept of a world.[11] But what is more important is that the question reveals to us the respect in which the being that is "beyond" the outer moving sphere is not wholly independent of the sphere itself. To

see this more clearly, note how Aristotle continues immediately after his assertion that there is eternal, changeless, and impassive divine being beyond the outermost circumference, being described as enjoying, throughout all ages—all *αἰῶνα*—a life like that of the divine mover as described in *Metaphysics* 12 (12.7, 1072b25–29).

> And this word (*αἰῶνα*) was a divinely inspired coinage of our ancestors. For the end that encompasses (*περιέχον*) the time of each thing's life and that cannot naturally be gone beyond, they called the *αἰών* of each thing. By the same argument the end of the entire heaven as well and that which contains all time even unto infinity is *αἰών*, taking the name from the words *ἀεὶ εἶναι* (to be forever), for it is deathless and divine. From it proceeds the being and life of all other things, some more obviously, others more obscurely. And in the popular philosophical works upon the divine, it is frequently made clear by argument that the first and highest divinity is of necessity altogether unchanging (*ἀμετάβλητον*), which confirms what we have said. For neither is there anything superior that can move it (for then that would be more divine) nor has it anything bad nor does it lack anything fair appropriate to it. And it moves with an unceasing motion, as is reasonable. For all things only cease moving when they arrive at their appropriate place, but for the body that moves in a circle it is the same place from which its motion proceeds and in which it ends. (*De Caelo* 1.9, 279a23–279b4)

It is clear in this passage that the eternal and unchanging being that Aristotle has just described, although conceptually distinct from the outermost self-moving sphere that it is said to be beyond, is at the same time not independent of it. Aristotle moves with casual ease from speaking of one to speaking of the other and back again, as though they formed the soul and body of a single divine entity. To be sure, he nowhere explicitly terms the motive principle of the heaven *a soul,* any more than he terms the first mover of the *Physics* or *Metaphysics* a soul. But he is clear that insofar as the heaven exhibits the mode of motion it does, it may be said to be alive, that is, *ensouled—ἔμψυχος*—and to be so precisely by virtue of possessing a principle of motion: "the heavenly sphere is ensouled, that is, it

possesses a principle of motion (*ὁ δ' οὐρανός ἔμψυχος καὶ ἔχει κινήσεως ἀρχήν*)" (*De Caelo* 2.2, 285a29–30). The mover of the *Metaphysics,* described in terms equivalent both to those that describe the *De Caelo*'s outermost self-moving sphere and to those that describe the unmoved mover of the *Physics,* is equally said to be alive (*Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072b26–29). But it would surely be as odd to call something alive that in no sense has a soul as it would be conversely to call something that has a soul not alive, an oddity Aristotle notes in the *De Anima* (*De Anima* 1.5, 411a15–16). And how could this not be true, given that the term for *alive* is *ἔμψυχος*—*ensouled*; would it be reasonable to ask whether what is alive exhibits life?

But for reasons that we can understand, the term for soul—*ψυχή*—comes to be used by Aristotle exclusively to refer to the principle of life in the earthly zoosphere. There it refers, as the discussion of the *De Anima* makes clear, to what we have called a first-level realization, that is, to an ability for active functioning that characteristically may or may not be realized, a capacity characteristically that may or may not be actively exercised. The soul is, as he puts it, the principle of both sleeping and waking life (*De Anima* 2.1, 412a24–25). But the mover of the heavenly sphere neither sleeps nor slumbers, for the first movement of the heaven is eternal, uniform, and continuous. The force of this fact will be fully appreciated when in the *Metaphysics* we come to recognize the first mover as a being "whose very substance is activity—*ἧς ἡ οὐσία ἐνέργεια*" (*Metaphysics* 12.6, 1071b20).

It is therefore understandable that Aristotle never explicitly refers to the heaven as having a soul, or to the first mover as a soul. But that the first mover is importantly psychic should be clear from the fact that it constitutes the principle of the living activity of the heaven. We may therefore speak of it as forming with the heaven what is in effect the soul and body of a single divine entity. And what is equally clear in the passage we have just quoted is that this divine entity both moves with an eternal circular motion and is unmoved: "The first and highest divinity is of necessity altogether unchanging, which confirms what we have said. For there is neither anything superior that can move it (for then that would be more divine) nor has it anything bad nor does it lack anything fair appropriate to it. And it moves with an unceasing motion, as is reasonable" (*De Caelo* 1.9, 279a32–279b2).

The fact that in the *De Caelo* the first self-moving principle is described as unchanging may mean only that its motion is uniform. But it may also reflect the fact that every first mover is said to be unmoved, and that every instance of self-motion involves a principle that may be said to be unmoved. If, for example, I walk from Anaheim to Azusa, I am automotive, for my movement is an instance of self-movement. But my soul is unmoved. This does not mean either that there is nothing that we may cite as the explanation of my self-movement or that my soul does not, so to speak, accompany me to Azusa, choosing instead to remain among the bright lights and glittering streets of Anaheim and to direct my journey by remote control. What it means is that my soul is unmoved *qua mover.* It is not insofar as it is in motion that my soul explains my motion, nor need it be in motion to be the principle of such explanation.[12]

To be unmoved in this sense means simply to be first in a chain of causal explanation, to be, in other words, a first mover. A first mover such as my soul need not move in order to be the principle of further motion; the question of its motion is independent of the question of its explanatory power relative to subsequent motions. But it may move. This is exactly what it means that my soul as first mover may be in motion accidentally (*Physics* 8.6, 259b17–20).

So with the motion of the *primum mobile.* In order to understand the sense in which its motive principle is unmoved, we need not imagine that as the sphere of the fixed stars makes its daily orbit about the earth, this principle remains immobile, situated at Control Center somewhere in a cosmic Houston and directing from afar that first motion. This description is incorrect in one sense in that it suggests the possibility of attributing place to this being, whereas where it is, in the beyond, there is (paradoxically) no place: "there is neither place nor void nor time outside (*οὔτε τόπος οὔτε κενὸν οὔτε χρόνος ἐστὶν ἔξωθεν*)" (*De Caelo* 1.9, 279a18).[13] And in another sense, the principle of the sphere's first motion may be said to inform the sphere and may therefore be thought to accompany (in a manner of speaking) its motion.

But here is a problem. In this sense, such a principle might appear to exhibit, like my soul when I journey from Anaheim to Azusa, accidental motion. The unmoved mover would be "carried along" by the motion of

that for whose motion it is responsible. If this were true, however, it would suggest that the soul of the first mobile cannot be the unmoved mover of the *Physics,* because that mover is said not to be moved even accidentally (*Physics* 8.6, 259b22–24).

This observation affords us the possibility of seeing why the uniform, eternal, and circular self-motion of the divine first mover is not incompatible with its being unmoved. For even in this second sense, the principle of the outermost sphere's motion does not exhibit the accidental motion that my soul might exhibit in the course of my journey from Anaheim to Azusa. For there is, as we have seen, no encompassing environment—no larger *περιέχον*—in relation to which as a whole it might be said to move from one place to another. Its motion, precisely because it is circular, eternal, and continuous, is self-contained, and by virtue of its "returning back on itself (*πάλιν ἀνακάμπτειν*)," (*On Generation and Corruption* 2.10, 337a7–8)[14] it remains at rest in relation to the larger context that it alone defines: "it is the same place from which its motion proceeds and in which it ends" (*De Caelo* 1.9, 279b2–3). It is in this sense that the primary motion itself may be termed unmoved—*ἀκίνητον*. It is a sense, as we will soon remark, that anticipates the more important sense in which the divine substance that is essentially active is unmoved.

The divine being of the *De Caelo,* from one point of view the deathless and unceasing motion of the outermost heaven and from another the unchanging and ageless divinity beyond that heaven, is thus unmoved in a sense nonetheless compatible with its being in continuous and uniform circular motion. In the *De Caelo,* that motion is connected specifically with the divine first mover, whereas in the *Physics* it has come to be associated with the mediate motion of the *primum mobile*, the outermost moving sphere moved by the first mover. This fact, however, does not undermine the substantial community between the account of the *De Caelo* and that of the *Physics.* It reveals rather the conceptual separation between the aspects of the first heavenly motion and the shift of attention that has occurred in the *Physics* in the context of the specific argument of that work.

7. The Unmoved Mover and Activity

There is, however, another respect in which we may think of the eternal self-motion of the *De Caelo* as unchanging, even if we concentrate on the first self-moving sphere alone, and it is important for understanding Aristotle's larger strategy. This respect is clearly adumbrated in Aristotle's description of circular motion in the passage we first looked at. It rests upon the sense in which circular motion is an image of that mode of unmoving being that is at the same time not mere rest, the being that we have seen Aristotle describe as *energeia*.

I remarked earlier on the similarity between Aristotle's description in the *De Caelo* of the life of divine being "beyond" the heavens and his description in the *Metaphysics* of the life of divine substance. Recall further the similarity between the language of Aristotle's description in the *De Caelo* of divine circular motion itself and that of his description in *Metaphysics* 9.6 of activity in contrast to motion. Divine circular motion is said to have no limit, but to govern those motions that have a limit, and to be complete and to encompass those motions that are incomplete (*De Caelo* 2.1, 284a4–8). Just so, activities are contrasted to those "actions that have a limit, none [of which] is a completion, but is the sort of thing relative to a completion . . . [and so] is not an action or at least not a complete one (just because it is not a completion)" (*Metaphysics* 9.6, 1048b18–23).

The parallel should suggest a recognition of uniform circular motion as a mediating figure that is in one sense clearly motion, but in another virtually a mode of the *energeia* that is contrasted to motion. Recall that although *energeia* and motion are, in other places and in other contexts, intimately related insofar as they contrast to the indolent rest of inactivity (*Metaphysics* 9.3, 1047a30–32), the contrast of *Metaphysics* 9.6 is meant to determine activity specifically as unmoved—*ἀκίνητον*—and it does so largely in the same terms in which circular divine motion is characterized.

These parallels should equally begin to suggest to us that there is a continuity of thought throughout Aristotle's argument, but that just as Aristotle's emphasis shifts from the *De Caelo* to the *Physics,* so it shifts in the context of the argument of the *Metaphysics.* The shift is an important

one, but subtle; it is reflected largely in Aristotle's identification of the first mover as the divine being whose essential nature is *energeia*.

In chapter 6 of *Metaphysics* 12, in the context of his discussion of the mode of divine being that may be said to be the principle of substance itself, and thus of being in general, Aristotle turns his attention to that substance which he describes as eternal and unmoved—*ἀκίνητον* (*Metaphysics* 12.6, 1071b4). The arguments that he gives for the necessity of such a mode of unmoved substantial being are essentially those of the *Physics*. But now, in keeping with the prominent role that *energeia* has come to play in the argument of *Metaphysics* 8 and 9, the discussion immediately moves to an account of divine substance as a being that is essentially active, that is, characterized as *energeia*.

In the remainder of chapter 6, the term *unmoved—ἀκίνητον*—nowhere appears. The argument now centers upon the invocation of *activity—energeia*—as the necessary principle of motion and of that eternity of motion that was explained in the *Physics* by the first mover's being unmoved. "If [eternal substance] is not active (*μὴ ἐνεργήσει*), there will not be motion, nor if it is active, but its essential being is the ability to act (*ἡ δ'οὐσία αὐτῆς δύναμις*); for then there will not be eternal motion" (*Metaphysics* 12.6, 1071b17–19). There must therefore, Aristotle concludes, be a principle that is substantially active: a being "whose very substance is activity—*ἧς ἡ οὐσία ἐνέργεια*" (*Metaphysics* 12.6, 1071b20). When at the beginning of the next chapter Aristotle sums up his earlier argument, he does so by noting that it follows from what has gone before that

> there is something that is moving with an unceasing motion, which is a circular motion, . . . and therefore the first heaven must be eternal. There is therefore also something that moves it. But since that which is moved and moves is also intermediate, there is therefore something that is not in motion but moves (*οὐ κινούμενον κινεῖ*), something eternal that is both substance and activity (*ἀίδιον καὶ οὐσία καὶ ἐνέργεια οὖσα*). (*Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072a21–26)

The systematic redescription of unmoved substance as active substance—the replacement of the term *ἀκίνητον* by the term *ἐνέργεια*—is not an abandonment of the requirement that the first mover be

unmoved. What it discloses is the sense in which the first mover must be understood. For it is a principle that is unmoved in a deeper and more subtle sense than the simple *ἀκίνητον* may capture, the sense revealed in recognizing the divine principle of motion and being alike as substance that is *activity*.

Behind this disclosure is the fact that I have consistently stressed, particularly in Chapter 2: the fact that for Aristotle the concept of motion must itself be understood in terms of this deeper concept of activity, the *energeia* that is prior to motion and realized not by a change from one characteristic to another—"*ἐξ ἐναντίας μεταβαλὼν ἕξεως*"—but rather by the active exercise of an ability that was present but not in operation—"*ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν . . . μὴ ἐνεργεῖν δ' εἰς τὸ ἐνεργεῖν*" (*De Anima* 2.5, 417a32–417b2). We have seen that this prior concept of *energeia* enables Aristotle to give an account of motion in terms of activity: something is in motion when its ability to be other than it is, an ability dormant when the thing is at rest, is actively exercised, that is, when the thing is *most fully being able to be other* (*Physics* 3.1–2, 201a28–202a2). More critically, we have seen *energeia* invoked by Aristotle as the active exercise of a being's nature, where it is contrasted to motion as an activity that is its own perfection. Now it is invoked in Aristotle's analysis of the principles of motion and change. Here it is deathless and divine, and from it proceeds the being and life of all other things, some more obviously, others more obscurely.

In Book 12 of the *Metaphysics,* where divine substance is invoked as the principle of the being and motion of the cosmos as a whole, its identity as activity is thus particularly relevant to our earlier discussion. For activity, as the principle of motion in general, is most specifically and immediately figured in circular motion, that species of motion which, since any part of its journey is as much the end as any other, is activity's closest analogue. Circular motion may thus be said to aspire to activity as to a principle, that is, precisely in the way Aristotle spells out in his celebrated description of the divine bringing about motion by love and attraction (*Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072b3–4).

In one sense *energeia* is figured in the axis of such motion, in the still point at the center of the most energetic activity. This image of ceaseless activity made serene by its unmoved center as a figure of the cosmos and its individual modes of activity alludes to earlier figures. Think of the

Republic's figure of a spinning top's immovable peg, the unwobbling pivot that is a type of the calm and ordered soul at the center of the dialogue's politically active hero (*Republic* IV 436D). Or recall the shining, singing axles of the chariot that takes the Parmenidean neophyte to the place of his revelation, a revelation of "the unmoving heart of full-circling truth (*Ἀληθείης εὐκυκλέος ἀτρεμὲς ἦτορ*)."[15]

But it is equally the bounding and limiting circumferential motion itself that, in its establishment of limit and its steadiness of circuit, figures that reality. Unless we recognize the force and intimacy of this analogy between activity and circular motion, we risk being led to think that when Aristotle describes the first mover as unmoved, he means to suggest that it is inert and inactive. The danger is analogous to the more general danger that we will be led to think of an Aristotelian substance as an inert thing rather than as a determinate center of active being. These are seriously mistaken, and analogously mistaken, readings of Aristotle's views. Just as it is the determinacy and steadiness of a substance's activity that constitute it as an instance of substantial being rather than as merely the fugitive activity of accidental being, so it is the unmoved steadiness of full-circling motion, the unmoved steadiness by which it figures and aspires to *energeia,* that marks it as divine and as the principle of all lesser motion.

8. The Unmoved Mover as the Principle of Activity

Aristotle's notion of a divine first mover is thus not a simple concept. At one level, the first mover is the ceaseless encircling motion of the outermost heavenly sphere. We may want to distinguish between this self-moving sphere itself and the principle of its motion, as between the outermost heavenly body and its soul. But given that it is self-moving, and given Aristotle's understanding of the soul as nothing other than the active principle and formal being of the living body, it is not surprising that in the *De Caelo,* the first mover is indifferently thought of as the outermost moving sphere of the heavens itself and as the divine unchanging being that informs that sphere, indifferently thought of, we might almost say, in the two senses of *first mover.*

The relative emphasis appropriate to each of these beings will depend on larger issues concerning body and soul and concerning economies of

ontological theory (compare Spinoza's later exploration of the complex modalities of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*). It will moreover depend on strategies of explanation and emphasis local to specific contexts. In the *Physics,* concerned specifically with the question of the eternity and uniformity of motion, Aristotle stresses the fine structure of motion's explanatory context by focusing attention, with an emphasis lacking in the *De Caelo,* upon the first mover as the analogue of heaven's soul. Of equal moment for Aristotle is the fact that the formal principle of this first mover (whether we understand it as the whole of the first heaven or only as that aspect that may properly be called the unmoved mover of the *Physics*) is a divine being whose mode of activity is the explanatory principle of motion in general, and indeed more basically of being in general. It is the divine being whose essential nature is more revealingly identified in the *Metaphysics* as *energeia,* as self-fulfilling activity.

But it may seem that I have here left unresolved a question that might be the central issue. Recall that earlier we judged the motion of the outermost sphere in the *Physics* no longer to be self-explanatory, but in need of causal explanation by a mover that is *separate* from the first moving sphere. This is indeed why we thought that in the *Physics,* the first motion is not a self-motion, as mover and moved are distinguished and indeed actually separate. Shouldn't we then consider the question whether the first moving principle of the *Physics* and *Metaphysics* is, in a way not true in the *De Caelo,* a separate being?

But we need first to know what this question—is the first principle of motion indeed separate from (or perhaps *transcendent* to) that which is first moved?—is meant to ask. Consider this fantastic scenario. Suppose that we could transport several ancient students of Aristotle into the present and show them our picture of outer space (as we now call it). How would they respond? To begin with, they might be interested in the fact that there appears in this picture no outermost sphere, but rather a deep three-dimensional space in which the stars are situated. They should view this fact as part of an astronomy that is different from Aristotle's and, assuming we could reveal to them the surrounding body of scientific theory needed to provide the proper context, one that at least most of them would accept as correct. They would, in other words, recognize as

we do that Aristotle's physical astronomy constitutes a picture of the physical nature of the universe that is, relative to ours, a primitive one.

But what of metaphysics and theology? Here, I think, the philosophical arguments that perhaps led these followers of Aristotle to embrace the theory of an unmoved mover and first principle of activity would be seen as unaffected by their conversion to a new scientific theory. For there is no story to be told about philosophical theology and ontology analogous to that which we have told about astrophysics. Whatever our visitors might come to think about the correctness of Aristotle's supply-side kinetics, in which the great steady wealth of motion of deathless and divine heavenly bodies trickles down to those confused and violent motions that govern our poorer and mortal (though perhaps finally more interesting) lives, we should expect that they would continue to insist on the correctness of the metaphysical and theological principles behind such a theory.

Suppose in particular that we were to make the following observation, parallel to our having pointed out that there is no outermost celestial sphere of crystalline ether: "notice that there is also no 'prime mover' other than the movement of these celestial bodies; clearly that part of Aristotle's theory is incorrect as well." I think that in response to this point we should expect from the more sophisticated of our Aristotelian visitors a mild amusement, much as we might expect in response to someone's asking exactly where in the heavens Heaven itself is located, or where in the animal is the soul itself. For we clearly would have misunderstood the ontological import of Aristotle's discourse about the first mover.

Can we translate the question of the first mover's separate transcendence such that it is not so foolish and thus not so easily dismissed? The proper question, I think, might go like this: is the circular self-motion of the heavens both explanatory and self-explanatory, so that in giving an account of the world understood as I described it at the beginning of this chapter—an account such as we find in the *De Caelo* in terms of an eternal principle of circular self-motion—we will have given a full and complete account of such motion? Here I think the proper Aristotelian answer is, in Aristotle's own words, *τινὶ μὲν τινὶ δ'οὔ*—in a sense yes, in a sense no.[16]

For we will indeed have given an account of the motions of the heavens, and in so doing given an account, at some very broad level, of the changes and cycles of change of our sublunary lives. Such an account recognizes that there is but one comprehensive universe whose cycles and configurations of change are organically connected and importantly related. The force that through the heavens drives the chariot of the sun is the same force that through the green fuse drives the flower (and thus my green age), and the cycles of the heavens both determine and variegate the fabric of our lives. This is the force of Aristotle's discussion of cyclical causality at the end of *On Generation and Corruption* (*On Generation and Corruption* 2.11, 338a15–338b20), and it is the recognition articulated in the *Metaphysics* in his remark that "all things are somehow ordered together—*πάντα συντέτακταί πως*" (*Metaphysics* 12.10, 1075a16). To see in addition that the prime and cosmic shaping motions of that universe, the motions that we know in their appearances as the complex periodic cycles of our life—most basically the cycles of day and night and of the yearly seasons—are self-motivated and therefore self-explanatory, is to view the universe, in a way common to Aristotle and many other thinkers, as *given,* as complete in itself.

But Aristotle invites us in addition to recognize the fact that motion itself is an incomplete form of activity. This is the invitation that we have seen him extend throughout the *Physics* and *Metaphysics,* and it is this fact, for which I have been arguing in these pages, that explains why the first mover of the *Metaphysics* stands behind the prime mover of the *Physics* and the *De Caelo.* For as the principle of becoming is being, so the principle of motion is activity, and Aristotle, like Father Parmenides before him, finds at the heart of all being that which is unmoved but not inactive—that "unmoving heart of full-circling truth" that I earlier cited. At the heart of the cosmos is a complete and completely active being, common in its affiliation and divine in its aspect. It is for this reason that the first mover which in the *De Caelo* is the self-moving outermost sphere and whose mediate principle in the *Physics* is the unmoved mover that is the soul of that sphere must finally, in the *Metaphysics,* be described as the *energeia* of divine substance—not simply an unmoved mover, but, what is more important, a steady and unflagging activity.

CHAPTER 8

Divine Being and Thought

So Aristotle's first mover, contrary to a thought early in Chapter 7, is in fact a principle that is paradigmatic in the sense we there introduced. This is true by virtue of the significance of *being unmoved* that I have tried to reveal. As self-moving, the first mover is the principle of the motion of all lesser animate self-movers. More significantly, as the exemplar of the self-fulfilling and therefore unmoving activity of *energeia,* it is the formal and ontological principle of all motion and change, as indeed it is of being in general. For activity, as we have seen throughout our discussion, is the principle alike of change and of being.

Now we need to think more about what it means that the divine, in addition to being identified in the *Physics* as the primary principle of movement, is identified in the *Metaphysics* as the primary principle of being. At the end of Chapter 3, I sketched a story about how this identification could reasonably be made out, a story about how the divine might be thought to represent the principle of the being of substances. Now I want briefly to rehearse that story, and then to look at what is involved in Aristotle's claim that the divine may be understood as the primary principle of thought. What does it mean that the divine is not merely identified as a being whose substance is activity, but is also depicted as engaged in a particular activity, that of thinking? This description of the

divine as a certain activity of being and of thinking is not limited to the text of the *Metaphysics.* In the *Nicomachean* as in the *Eudemian Ethics* (for example, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.6, 1096a24–26) Aristotle argues that the good is predicated in the category of what something is—*ἐν τῷ τί*—when we say of something that it is the divine and thought: *ὁ θεός καὶ ὁ νοῦς*—God and mind.[1]

1. The Divine as Formal Principle of Being

We can see the respect in which the being of Book 12, a being identified as divine, is a formal principle of substance, and therefore transitively a formal principle of being, by attending to Aristotle's description of divine being. The substance that is called divine is characterized by Aristotle at a moment of conclusion in Book 12 in these words: "There must therefore be such a principle whose very substance is activity—*δεῖ ἄρα εἶναι ἀρχὴν τοιαύτην ἧς ἡ οὐσία ἐνέργεια*" (*Metaphysics* 12.6, 1071b20–21). *Whose very substance is activity.* Its essential being, in other words, is identical with *energeia*—with activity per se; it is identical with what is for Aristotle, as we have seen, the principle of something's being what it is—the principle of a thing's substance. How are we to understand this identity?

When we specify the substance of any natural thing, we do so in terms of the complex activity involved in the acting out of that thing's specific substantial nature. When I say of McCorquodale, for example, that he is a human being, the specification of his substance is given in terms of the activity of *being human.* The further elaboration of this activity—specifying and exploring the determinate capacities and activities that make up being human and that constitute the details of *being a human,* the specifics of *τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*—that elaboration remains a task for (among other systems of descriptive and explanatory discourse) the science of anthropology.

McCorquodale's-being-human is a *particular* instance of *being*, but it is an instance of being—an instance indeed of substance being—and it is therefore formally represented by the general mode of something's *being what it is.* It is, as the argument of the *Metaphysics* is meant to show, an instance of a particularly rich and complex *energeia:* the activity of

something's being human. McCorquodale's being is being *human* and thus itself only one determinate instance of that general mode of being that we have identified as substantial activity. That *general* mode of being, however, is the formal principle of the *being of the world*. And it is in this sense that activity may be said to be divine. Divine being is the principle of that general mode of determination by which McCorquodale (for example) is specifically human, and it is therefore the principle of substance.

If, therefore, I wish to indicate McCorquodale's substance in a *purely formal* manner, to assert simply that he is *what he is,* whatever that may be, I describe his substance simply as *energeia*—activity. This is equally true of any other substance, of whatever specific nature it may be. Lady Suffolk is a horse, but to indicate her substance in a purely formal manner, I will once again describe it simply as *energeia.* The details of these formal descriptions—the explications of the purely formal mode of each thing's *being what it is*—*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*—will also be the same for each; that is the subject matter of first philosophy. Just so, the specific details of McCorquodale's *being what he is*, in his case, being a human—*τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*—and the specific details of Lady Suffolk being what she is—*τὸ ἵππῳ εἶναι*—are respectively the subject matters of anthropology and of the science(s) of horses. But the principle of those modes of being, a principle whose details are set forth in an ideal science of metaphysics and dialectically discussed in the work we call the *Metaphysics,* is, as the unfolding argument of that work makes clear, simply *energeia.* Such a principle is therefore the *divine being identified as energeia.* It is thus that theology articulates the principles of metaphysics.

2. The Divinity of Thought

The particulars of the divine concern Aristotle in the chapters immediately before and immediately after that in which he identifies what it is that is divine. I now want to consider the chief of these particulars: the fact that God is spoken of with reference to *νοῦς*—to thought or consciousness. This means, I will suggest, that our capacity to think of being is, like being itself, a godly thing. Aristotle—in what is a Parmenidean thought—sees the awareness of the world, which permeates all life and is

most explicit and sublime in human thinking, as one with being in its divinity. Thought, therefore, is both recognized as divine and used by Aristotle to represent the activity of the divine.

Because it is so natural for us to think of Aristotle's divine substance as a being that thinks, it may be worth our while first to recall how the connection between thinking and divine being reveals itself. In *Metaphysics* 12.6 we are, as we saw, introduced to what is identified as "a principle whose very substance is activity" (*Metaphysics* 12.6, 1071b20–21). We are subsequently told that all things are moved by this being as "thought is moved by the object of thought" (*Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072a30) and that it is therefore (as we have seen) a principle "on which depend heaven and earth" (*Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072b14). It is some time before we are told explicitly—although the observant reader will already have caught on—that this is a principle that we should want to call divine. After describing its characteristic mode of being, which, he asserts, includes among other things activity and life, Aristotle explains his assertion that God indeed enjoys just such a life with the observation: "for this thing [we have been talking about] is God—*τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ θεός*" (*Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072b31).

Note that the earliest connection of thought with the divine is in Aristotle's description of divine being as the object of thought—as *νοητὸν*. It is not until late in the chapter that the connection with thinking rather than with being thought of occurs, beginning right after the passage I cited in which heaven and earth are described as depending upon this principle. Aristotle there sets out to give us an idea of the mode of existence of this being, known up to now only as a principle of activity, and he does so by means of a figurative account that relies upon simile to convey to the reader that mode of existence: "Its way of life (*διαγωγή*) is like the best of what is ours for a short time, and it is indeed always thus, which is for us impossible" (*Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072b14–16).

Aristotle then invokes the pleasure of perfected activity to explain the pleasure we take in cognitive awareness. He first reminds us of the pleasure of such awareness, from the most vivid and yet abstract—the wakefulness that we often call merely "being conscious"—to such etiolated modes as hope and memory, mentioning in particular perception and thought (*Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072b17). Perhaps Aristotle takes wakeful-

ness, perception, and thought to be pleasant because they are activities. But the choices seem overdetermined for that reading to be persuasive. It may be rather that these particular activities are chosen by Aristotle because they are "images and shadows" of the activity that is ours when we think.[2]

This explanation may seem more convincing, but if we ask why Aristotle takes as given that the divine life is one of thinking, the answer should also be in terms of the central characterization so far given of divine substance: that it is *energeia*. For the assumption that the activity of divine being is thinking must result in part from the view that thinking is a paradigm instance of activity. And in what immediately follows, Aristotle indeed refers specifically to the pleasure of thinking in terms of thought as an activity:

> Thought thinks itself insofar as it participates in what is thought of; for that which contacts and thinks comes to be thought of, so that thought and what is thought of are the same. That which is capable of receiving what is thought of, that is, substance, is [the faculty of] thought. It is active when it grasps it, so that it is the latter rather than the former that is the divine which thought seems to involve, and active thinking (*θεωρία*) is most pleasant and best. (*Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072b19–23)

He then proceeds to tells us that "if God always enjoys this well-being which we sometimes do, this is wonderful, and if more than this—*εἰ δὲ μᾶλλον*—more wonderful yet" (*Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072b24–25).

Note the double transcendence that Aristotle attributes to divine activity. The view that he puts forward is not merely that God thinks as we do, only all the time rather than merely some of the time. It is that God engages in an activity that is like thinking, but is something more. Aristotle's *more* here may recall Plato's description of the good as "beyond substance—*ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*" (*Republic* 509b9). Simplicius supports a similar claim that Aristotle had in mind something beyond thought by quoting from the lost *On Prayer* Aristotle's assertion that "the divine is either thought or something beyond thought—*ἐπέκεινά τι τοῦ νοῦ*."[3] Simplicius's testimony may or may not be accurate, and

there may or may not be a connection between it and Aristotle's remark here. But the remark underscores my earlier suggestion that we interpret Aristotle's attribution of thinking to the divine in light of what is in fact a reverse attribution: the attribution of divinity to thinking. Thought, as Aristotle puts it at the beginning of chapter 9, "seems to be the most divine of phenomena" (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b16).

So the claim that God thinks turns out to mean something like this: thinking is divine, and because thinking is divine it may be the clearest icon we have of divine being, of the principle whose essential nature is activity and on which depend heaven and earth. So we say that God thinks because (1) we understand consciousness to be divine, and because (2) we want to understand the self-directed activity that is divine, and thinking most revealingly represents this activity. Aristotle employs a similar strategy in the *Nicomachean Ethics* when arguing that the critical element in a happy life is active thought—*θεωρία*. There the revelation of thought as divine activity, which justifies the claim that in such activity is our highest happiness, is established by a process of elimination (*Nicomachean Ethics* 10.8, 1179b21–24). No constructive argument establishes thinking as what a god does; that fact emerges only dialectically in the course of an argument designed to show what is most divine in our life.

In describing God's thinking as a figure for a mode of being divine, I do not mean to deny that Aristotle's concern is with the thinking of God, but only to undertake an explanation of that concern. The explanation could be thought of as part of a project of *philosophical hermeneutics*, parallel to a biblical hermeneutics such as would devote itself to understanding sayings like *God led Israel from Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm.* In the same way, we might want to understand precisely what a philosopher in another tradition meant in saying that *God thinks* or that *God is thought.*

Such sayings, like Euripides's saying that *thought is a god,* or like the saying of Sophocles that *good sense is a great god,* are not easy to interpret.[4] How are we to read them? Perhaps there was a god named Phronesis, whose memory survives only in the cult of St. Prudence, patron saint of the careful, and the Sophoclean line is a fragment of a hymn to her greatness. That thought may be far-fetched, but it is interesting to note

that the *Greek-English Lexicon* of Liddel and Scott lists among the meanings of ἔρως: (1) "love, desire," and (2) "as proper noun, [Eros] the God of love."[5] We may understand the reasoning behind such a lexicographic decision, but why shouldn't there then be a special entry under νοῦς: *as proper name, in Anaxagoras and Aristotle, for example, Nous, the god of thought.*

Such lexicographic distinctions may be a mark of our discomfort at the ease with which earlier writers could say that love is a god. For we may feel compelled, by a logical or even theological fastidiousness, to distinguish carefully statements about God's attributes from statements about the divinity (or some modern demythologized analogue to divinity) of such attributes. There are, however, moments in our discourse—even for those of us with thin liturgical lives—when we can recognize the near-interchangeability of *God is compassionate* and *compassion is divine.*

But it remains difficult to know how to negotiate these matters, and how to understand properly the meaning of the tragedian's *Love is a great god,* or *Thought is a god,* of the epistler's *God is Love,* or of Aristotle's *God is thought.* The idea that I am suggesting is that their grammar must be understood in terms of the grammar of *love* or *thought is divine.* Thus Cicero read Euripides's fragment: "therefore the soul, as I say, is divine, or as Euripides ventured to say, is a god" (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* I.26.65). The path of proper understanding for these sayings must take us through love and thought themselves, but love and thought revealed, to use Bonaventure's pregnant phrase, as God's footprints: *vestigia dei.*[6]

3. Perplexities concerning Divine Thought

The opening of *Metaphysics* 12.9 bears out the reading I have just suggested: "The topic of thought involves several perplexities; it seems to be the most divine of phenomena, but how it must be if that is to be so involves several difficulties" (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b15–17). Thought is here introduced as an activity that is divine. I have suggested that this idea makes sense of the converse attribution of thought to divine substance. But the details of this chapter cast light on two questions that might suggest themselves in light of Aristotle's opening remarks. (1) What is it about thought that is so divine that it can serve as a suitable

icon for the activity of divine being? and (2) what are the difficulties to which Aristotle refers at the beginning of this chapter that attend understanding thought as divine?

Here is an answer to the first question: what is divine about thought is its universal power, the fact that thought, by virtue of its ability to think of anything at all, is capable of assuming the being all things. It surely must be by virtue of this power of thought that Aristotle can allow that the soul "is in a sense all being—*τὰ ὄντα πώς ἐστι πάντα*" (*De Anima* 3.8, 431b21). For thought is neither limited nor constrained by anything in what it is about; on the contrary, mind governs because it knows all things. Only because it is thus most powerful is it capable, so to speak, of steering all things through all. And it is most powerful because it is most versatile, most capable of assuming the being of its objects whatever they might be. We may remember Aristotle's parallel observation in the *De Anima*: "it is necessary, therefore, since it thinks all things, that it be unmixed, as Anaxagoras puts it, in order that it may rule, that is, in order that it may know" (*De Anima* 3.4, 429a18–20).

But we should recall as well the care with which Aristotle distinguishes between the universal *capacity* of thought, mind as powerful but mere ability—a way of characterizing thought that leads him then to describe it as nothing at all but ability (*De Anima* 3.4, 429a21–22)—and the thinking that is the active exercise of this capacity. And perhaps most of all, we should recall thinking's role as that which in its activity makes what is capable of being thought *of*—that is, of being the object of thought—actually thought *of.* And think here how much the description of this latter thought is, as a long and distinguished tradition recognized, the description of a being that is divine (*De Anima* 3.5, 430a10–25).[7]

It seems unlikely, then, that the divinity of thought results simply from its power, as though what were to be revered about it were simply its ability, an ability that might obtain even if it actually thought *of nothing.* Aristotle opens the chapter by reminding us that "if [thought] thinks of nothing, what about it would be worthy of reverence? It would be as though it were asleep" (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b17–18). So it must be that what is divine about thought is manifest in the exercise of thought, in active thinking. And this is surely what we should expect; for our con-

cern with the divinity of thought began because of its connection to divine activity.

It is revealing that this question—the question of whether thought's divinity resides in its power or in the exercise of that power—is expressed by Aristotle in terms of the question of whether or not thought is of something. As our discussion proceeds, the issue of thought's object will become increasingly important in connection to the second question I asked earlier, the question of the perplexity to which Aristotle wishes to draw our attention. For that perplexity concerns this very issue of thought's object. Here is the problem: unless thought thinks of some object, it will not be thinking, but only a capacity to think; whatever object it thinks of, however, threatens to eclipse thinking in importance and in worth.

The fact that divine thought must be active is recognized by Aristotle in the early introduction of thought's divinity we noted earlier: "That which is capable of receiving what is thought of, that is, substance, is [the faculty of] thought. It is active when it grasps it, so that it is the latter rather than the former that is the divine that thought seems to involve" (*Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072b22–23). And this active thinking, Aristotle insists, must belong to thought by virtue of itself and not by virtue of anything external to it. For if, although actively thinking of something, it is only determined in this activity by that thing it is thinking of, then that thing, so to speak, turns its thinking on, so that its *nature* will still not be activity. The power to think will belong to thought, but its exercise, the actual thinking, will be dependent upon something else, the object of the thinking. So although thought will be engaged in thinking, and the capacity to think therefore in operation, what thought is will still be merely this capacity, and not the operation in which it happens to be engaged. "If it thinks, but something else determines it [to think], then since that which constitutes its substance would be not thinking but being able to, it would not be the best substance. For it is because of thinking that worthiness belongs to it" (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b18–21). To explain the divinity of thought, then, we must understand it as something that in its very nature is a faculty in operation, something that is active; we must think of it as thinking. When we say that thought is divine, we must mean that the activity of thinking is divine.

But the question remains: thinking of what? Not to think of something is not to think (*Metaphysics* 4.4, 1006b10). But to think of some particular thing is to surrender the authority of thought to that which one thinks of, and it is then still the case that thinking is not what thought is but only what it happens to be doing given that one is thinking of that object. Perhaps then the essence of divine thought after all is merely the power to think of this object or that or another. But how could that be? As if it made no difference whether one were awake or asleep to whether one were something divine! So here is the beginning of the difficulties of which Aristotle speaks.

For a moment, Aristotle counsels us, forget this difficulty; for the question deepens the aporia in another direction. Whether thought should be considered as a capacity or as that capacity in operation in order to be considered divine, whether it should be considered as the ability to think or as the active exercise of thinking, the issue has raised for us another question: the ability to think or thinking *of what?* So Aristotle continues:

> Furthermore, whether its substance is [the faculty of] thought or [active] thinking, of what does it think? For it thinks either of itself or of something else, and if something else, it thinks either always of the same thing or sometimes of one thing and sometimes of another. Well, doesn't it make a difference whether thought is of what is noble or of any old thing at random? Wouldn't it in fact be absurd to be engaged in thought about some things? So it is clear that it thinks what is most divine and also most worthy, and does not change [from one object to another]. For change [from one object to another] would be for the worse, and furthermore it would be a motion. (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b21–27)

Our attention has here been redirected from the nature of thought to the nature of thought's appropriate object. That redirection may recall for us similar redirections: the redirection that Socrates urges in the *Symposium* when he turns the discussion from praise of love to praise of love's object (*Symposium* 199d–201c), or the repeated Socratic queries, in the *Gorgias* or in the *Charmides,* for example, as to what discourse is

discourse about, or what thinking is thinking of (*Gorgias* 449d–454a; *Charmides* 165c–169c). But note that the question here is not simply what might thought think, but the stronger question: what must it think if it is to be considered divine? Does it not make a difference, Aristotle asks, whether thought is of what is noble or of just anything? Well, that is an interesting question; does it or does it not make a difference?

4. The Problem of Thought's Intentionality

The troubles we have been exploring involve a pair of questions about the divinity of thought: (1) If we are to consider thought divine, must we understand it as the faculty of thought or as that faculty's exercise in active thinking? (2) If thought is divine, is there some restriction upon the object of thought? These questions concern the exact status and relationship, within Aristotle's complex psychic model of faculty, activity, and object, among the various terms of that model, and in particular the relationship between the central term—the activity of thinking—and the terms that, as it were, straddle either side of it.

The answer to the first of these questions has seemed clear: if thought is divine, it must be an activity: not a mere faculty, but the exercise of a faculty. The answer to the second might also seem clear: the object of divine thought can be nothing other than the divine itself. But note how in fact Aristotle's argument develops as the chapter continues.

> First, then, if [what] it is is not thinking but the ability to do so, it seems reasonable that it will be a task for it to continue thinking. And then it is clear that something else would be more valuable than thought: that which is thought of. For both thinking and the act of thinking characterize someone who is thinking even the worst of things. So if this is avoided—and it is indeed better not to see some things than to see them—thinking will not be the best thing. So it seems that it thinks itself, if indeed it is the best, and thinking is a thinking of thinking. (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b28–34)

Here Aristotle first reiterates the view that in order for thought to be divine, its essential nature must be the active exercise of the faculty of

thought—*θεωρία*. Then he connects this fact with the question of thought's object, and he appears to answer this question by saying that divine thought must have itself for an object. But the argument is subtle, and it is important that we look at it carefully if we are to understand the force of the familiar conclusion that divine thought thinks itself: a thinking thinking of thinking.

If, Aristotle argues, thought that is divine is essentially the faculty of thought rather than the activity of thinking, then each continuing moment of thought's activity would be a task that called for explanation, rather than the effortless outcome of its nature, and something would then have to call the faculty into operation. But then it is that which would be divine. The situation would be as we pictured it earlier, in which "something else determines it to think, [and] then since that which constitutes its substance would be not thinking but being able to, it would not be the best substance" (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b18–20). So divine thought must be active thinking—*θεωρία*. But the argument continues: even if we consider thought as active thinking, the issue of thought's object remains perplexing. For consider: someone thinking of even the worst of things is still thinking. So if we were inclined to avoid any act of thinking because it is of a bad object, this would show that thinking is not the best of things. For if thinking were the best, then thinking of even the worst object would still be choiceworthy, as it would, after all, still be thinking. Therefore if there is something such that it ought not to be thought, then the act of thinking is not the very best thing. Think of seeing: if there are things we do not like to see, that is because what we like is not simply seeing, but seeing the right sort of thing. If it is like that for thinking, then it is not thought, but thought's object that is divine.

Pause now and consider the force of this argument. If thought is to be considered as divine, this must be by virtue of the nature of thinking itself, not by virtue of anything that is thought of. What is divine about the act of thinking must be independent of its object, for if the nature of that object were what makes thinking divine, it is that which would be divine, and not simply thinking; in such a case the object of thinking would replace thinking as the divine. Recall that such replacement is precisely the result of Socrates's strategy in the *Symposium* that I invoked a moment

ago. There praise about love is replaced by praise about love's object, beauty. So here talk about the divinity of thinking would have to be replaced by talk about the divinity of what is thought of.

Reading the argument this way shows what is wrong with the standard interpretation of this passage, according to which Aristotle's intention is to argue that only God is worthy of being the object of divine thought, and that therefore divine thought must always be of itself. For on the view I am suggesting, what is required is not that divine thinking think of the best, but that it be the best independent of what it thinks of. There could of course be a further requirement that divine thought be only about an object worthy of it, and the argument is normally read as suggesting the grounds for such a requirement. But Aristotle here means to focus our attention simply upon the activity of thinking and its nature independent of whatever may be its object. There may be some objects more worthy of thought than others, but the worth of thought does not depend upon the worth of any such object. If we are to think of thinking as divine, we must simply think of it as that; otherwise we will be led to think of something else as better.

Here is the issue that lies at the heart of Aristotle's perplexities, perplexities that concern the intentionality of thought when we consider thought to be divine. If, on the one hand, we say that thought is not about anything, how could it be valuable in its own right? For then it would not be divine, nor indeed would it even be thought. "If [thought] thinks of nothing, what about it would be worthy of reverence?" (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b17). But if, on the other hand, we recognize thought's intentionality by specifying the object that thought is of, we threaten to make thought's object that which has prime importance and value, not thought; "something else would be more valuable than thought: that which is thought of" (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b30). Here, as I have suggested, the logic is that of the *Symposium,* and its surprising revelation that love is not a god and that love indeed is neither beautiful nor good (*Symposium* 202b5).

How then are we to explain at once thought's divinity and thought's intentionality? Aristotle offers what appears to be a solution to this perplexity in the following frequently quoted words: "it is of itself, therefore, that it thinks if indeed it is the best, and thinking is a thinking of thinking" (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b33–34). Here, in what would seem to

reinforce the traditional reading I have just called into question, Aristotle appears to offer reflexivity as a way to preserve thought's intentionality without allowing its value to bleed out into an object other than it. If thought is of itself, then the value that is taken to characterize its intentional object is not located elsewhere, but remains, as it were, with the thinking itself.

Aristotle immediately offers what seem to be two difficulties with this invocation of reflexivity as an answer to his perplexity. For, he continues, "it is evident that understanding and perception and belief and thought are always of something other, and of themselves [only] in a secondary mode (*ἐν παρέργῳ*)" (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b35–38). We might characterize a cognitive state as an understanding of understanding if it were, for instance, part of a second-order theory of the understanding, a piece of the philosophy of science or cognitive psychology. And I might similarly be said to believe that I believe something in the course, for example, of being led to consider whether my behavior is consistent with what I took to be a certain belief of mine. But in such cases, the cognitive state is importantly of an instance of understanding or of belief other than itself. These are not so much instances of reflexivity as they are instances of reflection upon other tokens of the same cognitive type.

We will need to consider later what Aristotle might mean by the secondary mode—the *παρέργον*—in which a mode of cognition might be said to be of itself. But in the meanwhile, to say that thought thinks of itself seems at best misleading. And in any case, Aristotle continues, such an answer would not address the question of whether it is the activity or the object of the activity that is the source of thought's divinity: "if thinking and being thought are distinct, then by virtue of which does the good belong to it? For what it is to think and to be thought of are not the same" (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b37–38).

5. Thought's Apparent Reflexivity

We have been led to wonder whether thinking could be its own object because the intentionality of thought (and of awareness in general) seemed to make the object emerge as the thing of importance in contexts of cognitive (and perceptual) consciousness. For a moment, it appeared

that reflexivity might restore that importance to thinking by understanding it to be its own object. But Aristotle offers several objections to this move. In every mode of cognitive awareness, he points out, the standard and primary object is other than the act of awareness. And as long as there is a distinction between act and object, between thinking and being thought, the question of the source of thought's divinity remains alive.

It would be surprising if these objections proved fatal to the notion that divine thinking is, in some sense, a form of self-thinking. But the difficulties may serve to alert us to the need to understand correctly what that sense is. In particular, our grasp of that sense, as I will now suggest, is ill-served by construing *thought thinking itself* as thought thinking of itself, for divine thought is not its own object.[8] Understanding this fact will enable us to see why Aristotle's assertion about thought that "it thinks [of] itself, . . . and is a thinking thinking [of] thinking" (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b33–34) is not meant to signify a mode of reflective self-awareness.

In the next moment of Aristotle's argument, he offers what seems to be a reply to these objections.

> But in some cases, isn't it true that understanding is the thing (*ἡ ἐπιστήμη τὸ πρᾶγμα*)? In the productive [sciences] without matter (*ἄνευ ὕλης*), it is the substance in the sense of what it is [for something] to be what it is. In the theoretical [sciences], the formula is the thing, and so is the thinking. Since what is thought of, therefore, is not different from thought in the case of things without matter (*ἄνευ ὕλης*), they will be the same, and thinking and what is thought will be one. (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b39–1075a6)

I have suggested that this reply is not meant to reinstate reflexivity as an answer to the larger problem concerning thought's intentionality. It remains true for Aristotle that consciousness is characteristically of something other than itself. Indeed, that is what intentionality means, and that is what Aristotle continues to insist on in claiming that "understanding and perception and belief and thought are always of something other, and of themselves [only] in a secondary mode (*ἐν παρέργῳ*)" (*Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b35–38). *Thought thinking itself,* therefore, must

be construed in such a way that it does not involve reflective self-awareness; it must reveal a mode of thinking in which there is no distinction between thinking and being thought, but in which thinking does not become its own object. Can an understanding of Aristotle's reply give us any clue as to what that might be?

Consider first what Aristotle means by saying that in some cases understanding—*ἡ ἐπιστήμη*—is the *πρᾶγμα*. It is standard to translate the term *πρᾶγμα* here as "object." This translation, especially given the fact that *νοούμενον* in the preceding and following lines is regularly rendered by *object of thought,* leads us easily to read Aristotle as referring to the object of the cognitive activity in question. So one commentator takes Aristotle here to be saying that "in certain cases thinking (the concept) and the object of thought are the same."[9] But then Aristotle's assertion that understanding is the object *in some cases* would be strange. For it is always the case, on Aristotle's view, that in the act of awareness, the activity and its object are one. This identity of course occurs only in the active exercise of sense and cognition, and only with respect to the actualization of the sensible and intelligible object. But it is general for all modes of awareness, and indeed for all those activities of the soul, such as nutrition, in which the self assimilates to itself an object that is other. The fact that Aristotle here describes understanding and *πρᾶγμα* as identical only in some cases may therefore lead us to doubt that he here intends *πρᾶγμα* to refer to the object of understanding.

Attention to the recurrent phrase "without matter—*ἄνευ ὕλης*" may offer a clearer sense of what *πρᾶγμα* means in this context. Recall that perception as well as thought involves a relation to that which is said to be *ἄνευ ὕλης*, without matter. Indeed the general account that Aristotle offers of a perceptual faculty is "what is able to receive perceptible forms without matter—*τὸ δεκτικὸν τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἰδῶν ἄνευ τῆς ὕλης*" (*De Anima* 2.12, 424a18). We need to make an excursion to see what Aristotle here means by "matter" and by "perceptible form," and to do this, I want to rehearse some obvious points about Aristotle's understanding of perception.

Suppose the perception in question is my seeing a red door. The matter of which Aristotle speaks is not the matter of the door, the wood or metal, for example, of which the door is made. For the form corresponding to that matter is the form of the door, the form that determines this

very matter to be a door. If that is what the eye received in perception, it would, in perceiving a door, become a door.

The matter of which he speaks is rather the door itself, which is the matter of the perceptual object: the visible door. It is this latter entity, of which the door is the matter, that is determined in its being by the perceptible—in this case the visible—form. For it is by virtue of this form that the door is visible. The door is the matter of the visible door in the same sense in which the horse is the matter of the gray horse; it is the substratum of which the determining quality is predicated. Just as the horse is gray, the door is visible.

The door's visibility is itself a power, an ability that the door has by virtue of its visible form. The capacity of vision is the correspondent ability of my body to be affected by the door's visibility independent of any nonvisible features that constitute the door as a door. These correlative powers enjoyed by my body and the door are exercised in the activity of vision, in which perception and its immediate object become one by virtue of the oneness of the activity that constitutes their mutual realizations: perceiving and being perceived (*De Anima* 3.2, 425b26). But while they do so, eye and door remain distinct. Although it is the door itself that I perceive, and not some phenomenal simulacrum of the door, I do not do so by becoming a door. It is not the door with which my eye achieves the unity characteristic of perception, but the visible form of the door. This form determines the door as object of perception; that is, it is the form that determines the door in its being as visible and, when that visibility is exercised, as perceived door.

The fact that it is the door that is visible and (sometimes) perceived thus means two things in Aristotle's theory of perception. (1) The door is the matter correlative to the sensible form; that is, it is the matter of the visible or perceived door. (2) The door, although it is thus the substratum of what Aristotle terms the immediate object of perception—the *καθ᾽ αὑτὸ αἰσθητὸν*—is nevertheless the ultimate object of perception. For it is ultimately the door that is being perceived; it is the thing—the *πρᾶγμα*—toward whose perception the entire activity of sense and its exercise is directed.

So the matter of perception's immediate object is important. For although it is not any part of the sensible form received by the faculty of perception, and is thus at best a remote object, it is that which the

awareness of perception is finally directed toward, the thing—*πρᾶγμα*—that is perception's ultimate object. Calling the *πρᾶγμα* the ultimate object of perception is meant to capture the fact that it is distinct from the sensible form that is the vehicle of our gaining awareness of it. Moreover, it reflects the fact that in the economy of perception, it is where ultimate importance lies. The end of an act of perception is not merely to perceive an immediate object, but to perceive the relevant matter characterized by that object, in this case the door.

Narrowly conceived, the activity of seeing consists in seeing, among other things, the door's color, red. But the point of the activity is to see that, in our example, the door is red—to gain awareness of the door being red. So when I see a red door, and see that it is red, the actual seeing red, precisely because it lacks matter, is subordinate to seeing the red door. It is, in other words, subordinate to seeing the remote object—the matter of perception's immediate object—qualified by its sensible form.

And now, after this long excursion, back to our text. When Aristotle writes that in some cases, understanding is the *πρᾶγμα*, he does not mean that the act of cognition in these cases reflects upon itself and takes itself as its own object, understanding itself. It is rather that in these cases there is no remote object beyond the immediate object of awareness. The *πρᾶγμα* is nothing but the immediate object of understanding with which the understanding becomes one, and it therefore occupies the place in the economy of importance and value that is occupied in perception by the remote, that is, the ultimate object of perception. This object of understanding is thus without matter—*ἄνευ ὕλης*. We may if we wish describe such cognition by saying that the understanding understands itself, but this should not be interpreted to refer to an act of reflective self-awareness.

This is what the highest form of thought is like, thought that Aristotle imagines the God to be engaged in. One with its immediate object, it is dependent on no remote object for its worth and importance. What is divine about our thought mirrors this self-presence represented in the thought of the divine. And now we can see why intentionality poses no threat to this fact. For all cognition involves awareness of an object; but the aspect of it that is divine, the awareness, is independent of any particular object. It is characterized, however, by a self-presence that Aristotle describes in terms that resemble—but merely resemble—

reflexive self-objectivity. This aspect is the divine consciousness most purely revealed in the activity of noetic awareness, but present in all forms of perceptual and cognitive awareness.

The thinking that is divine is both centered within itself and outward directed, and this means that the centeredness must be at once determinate and diaphanous. We have already learned this from the fact that first substance is pictured both as activity and as prime mover. Thus as *energeia* it is perfectly self-actualized and self-fulfilled activity whose only nature is activity, a principle upon which depend the being and the motion of the world. As mind it is transparent and self-present awareness, a principle upon which depend the cognitive power and activity of all that is alive. It is thus the principle of life, governing both of those features said at the beginning of the *De Anima* (whatever qualifications may prove subsequently necessary to account for vegetation) to characterize that which is alive: self-motion and perception, that is, awareness (*De Anima* 1.2, 403b26–27).

6. Consciousness and Self-Consciousness

What needs to be made clear if we are to give an account of thinking and its intentionality is not simply how thought is about its object, but how it grasps its object. We might imagine that we could somehow give a satisfactory theory of thinking merely by spelling out the de facto relations of picturing between thought and its object. But such a *realnoetik* ignores the fact that thinking is the activity of a conscious subject and involves the grasping and the awareness of its object. It is difficult, as is by now well known, to give an adequate account of this complex and elusive phenomenon. I have not meant to suggest that Aristotle offers a well-rounded theory of consciousness, but only that in registering the difficulties that arise from thought's intentionality, he points to the fact that intentionality involves the conscious grasping of its object.

Aristotle's argument, on the interpretation I have offered, is this: if thinking is to be the best of activities—*εἴπερ ἐστὶ τὸ κράτιστον*, as Aristotle puts it—it cannot be required to think of anything other than itself. But the assertion that thought thinks itself—*αὑτὸν ἄρα νοεῖ*—and the ensuing description of the activity of thought as a thinking that is the

thinking of thinking—*ἐστιν ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις*—does not refer to an act of reflective self-awareness. It signifies simply the internal self-presence that must characterize any act of cognition (whatever its object) insofar as it is an act of awareness. This is not to deny that an act of thinking—and therefore God's thinking—is in Aristotle's view an act of thought thinking itself. It is merely to distinguish between thought thinking itself and thought thinking *of* itself. It is, in other words, to distinguish between thought thinking itself in Aristotle's understanding and reflective self-consciousness, in which the self is broken off from itself as subject from object.

The failure to mark this distinction has led some to regard Aristotle's view as the errant nonsense of supposing one might think a thought that is of nothing but the thinking of it, or to worry (as others have) that Aristotle's theology posits a god supremely narcissistic and wrapped (as one scholar puts it) in eternal self-contemplation.[10] But these thoughts are errant nonsense; *thought thinking itself* signifies merely the activity of thinking, independent of the nature of its object and solely in terms of one central feature: the self-presence of the subject that is a condition of its consciousness.

In fact, Aristotle offers a description of thought as a cognitive reaching out that grasps the world in active awareness. And all cognitive awareness, if it is to grasp the world, must do so by virtue of the self-presence paradigmatically exemplified in the pure act of thinking. All cognition, then, of which divine being, as I am here arguing, is the formal principle—all cognition is objective; that is, it is intentional. Consciousness reaches out toward a world other than itself which it posits as its object. But at the same time it involves a mode of self-awareness that is nonobjective, an awareness of the self in which the self as aware is not present to itself in the same mode as the posited object of consciousness is. The project of explaining and elucidating this nonobjective mode of self-awareness—at once preventing it from collapsing into simple reflexive self-awareness while articulating the sense in which it is a condition of consciousness of the objective world—should be a central concern of philosophical anthropology.

I say this because it must be a central concern of any robust theory of human consciousness, given the fact that the spontaneity of self-

consciousness is a condition for the possibility of the receptivity of consciousness. But I say it also because such a project reveals the malleability of human being that is at the heart of Aristotelian anthropology.[11]

Compare this feature of mind that I have argued is revealed in the *Metaphysics* with the description of mind in the *De Anima*. In Book 3 of the *De Anima*, Aristotle pictures mind as having no determinate nature of its own (we might almost say being nothing in particular) apart from its capacity to become (without relinquishing its identity) whatever it takes as object: "so that it has no nature other than the fact that it has a certain capacity" (*De Anima* 3.4, 429a21–22). Consciousness as such is a power of receptivity, a power of openness to determination by the other, given at once active being and determinacy by its intentional object. This power of consciousness is for Aristotle an essential feature at the heart of what it is to be human, and in lesser degree, what it is to be alive. Animals are, as it were, beings of determinate indeterminacy, their essential nature involving the receptivity to a determination received through participation in the objective. This receptivity of animal awareness—the feature of perceptive life that we mark by describing animals as sensitive—plots, as I will suggest in a moment, the determinate receptivity of substance.

Thought as determinate receptivity, self-present and intentional, informs all of Aristotle's understanding of human awareness from perception to action to cognition. The fact that awareness is an essential feature of perception is expressed by Aristotle as the fact that "we perceive that we see and hear" (*De Anima* 3.2, 425b12) and he invokes a general cognitive awareness with the expression "we perceive that we perceive and think that we think" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 9.9, 1170a29).[12] In these cases Aristotle tries to capture the peculiarity of the mode of awareness by the faux reflexivity that we have just seen in his remarks that "thought thinks itself" or that "it is a thinking thinking thinking." In doing so he recalls perhaps the art with which Plato, in the *Charmides,* reads that elusive virtue of *sophrosyne* as the understanding of understanding—*ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστήμης*.[13]

The reading for which I have here argued is meant to reveal the divine on Aristotle's understanding as the principle of that self-awareness, diaphanous and nonreflective, by virtue of which as animals we are conscious of our world. Divinity is figured in the activity of such

consciousness, thought whose essential nature can be described as self-awareness, but precisely because it is the principle of awareness in general and thus independent of what it is the awareness of. What is divine about divine thought is not that it thinks of what is best, which happens to be itself, but that it alone is always actually thinking. And this figure of an eternal self thinking of the divine is simply the representation of divine being as the purest and most unqualified mode of *energeia*.

7. Thought and Substance

The discussion in *Metaphysics* 12 reveals to us that the principle of awareness, the formal and general power that characterizes animate being, is consciousness, the concomitant self-awareness and self-presence most abundantly expressed as divine thinking. That discussion should also remind us that it is not only the more familiar forms of scholastic analogical theology that are the descendants of Aristotle's thinking, but the traditions of negative theology as well, traditions closely aligned with religious mysticism, in which stand such thinkers as Plotinus, Avicenna, and Maimonides. For while these traditions deny the possibility of positive predication in relation to the divine, they often continue to refer to God as mind. Thus in his *Guide for the Perplexed,* after a long and energetic argument on behalf of the impossibility of any positive attribution of determinate being to God or of any predicates that might apply univocally to both God and creatures, Maimonides blithely identifies God as thought that thinks itself as what is thought, and asserts that the same self-thinking is true of human thought (*Guide for the Perplexed* 1, 68). He is able to do so without contradiction because he sees God's thinking as a reflection of the ontologically explanatory being of the divine as nothing other than what it is. This is a fact that Maimonides, looking laterally to another tradition of discourse about the divine, remembers God to have revealed when, in response to the prophet's request for self-identification that I referred to earlier, there emerges only the pronouncement: I am what I am (*Exodus* 3:13).

I suggested a moment ago that thought for Aristotle is a paradigm of the formal being of animal life in general, the being that he principally identifies with substance. In this we can recognize that Aristotle's

understanding of the divine in terms of thought continues his concern with divine being as the formal principle of substance. As the principle of soul in general, thought is thus in a sense the formal principle of substance itself. For divine consciousness as I have characterized it is the ideal mode of a general and defining feature of living substance that I stressed earlier. Substance is marked by Aristotle, we noted, as that which is receptive of further determination through the determinacy of essential being that characterizes it in the first instance as substance. A basic tenet of Aristotle's ontology, I suggested, concerns this relation between determinacy and determinability, that is, receptivity to further determination. It is because a substance is the determinate being it is that it is able to be the subject of attribution without being overwhelmed by it. This feature, as we have noted, is what Aristotle identifies in the *Categories* as substance's most characteristic mark: its ability to remain one and the same individual while undergoing incidental affection (*Categories* 5, 4a10–4b19). Think of mind, then, as mediating the two characteristics of substance that we have tracked throughout our thinking: being a subject and being what it is.

For humans, the most complex form of substance, this receptivity to further determination is most obviously manifest in perception and thought, but it is, as Aristotle's discussion in the *De Anima* makes clear, a general feature of human psychic powers. The nutritive capacity, for example—the capacity to eat—is an animal's capacity to take in food (the power to ingest) and to transform that food into itself (the power to digest) while remaining itself; in the same way, the capacity to perceive is a power to take in the sensible form of the world and transform it into an object of consciousness.

Mind represents living substance's capacity to be determined by the object of consciousness while remaining itself, for the faculty of thought is the psychic power so to be determined without relinquishing determinate identity. This is what Aristotle means when he describes mind as impassive—*ἀπαθής*; it is incapable of being shaken in its identity (*De Anima* 3.4, 429a15–16; 3.5, 430a18). It is this remarkable power of mind—the power to become all things and yet to remain steadfastly what it is—that makes it, I have argued, emblematic of the characteristic nature of substance. It is because of this that divine substance is not only the

principle both of thinking and in general of the animate modes of awareness, but of substance itself.

One basic truth about animal substance has been slighted in this description. This is the truth of which I spoke at the end of Chapter 3: the fact that we at best approximate the divine being that is at work being itself. But there is another side of this fact of which Aristotle speaks elsewhere. In the opening of Book 2 of his treatise *On the Generation of Animals* we read:

> Among the things there are, some are eternal and divine, while others may both be and not be. The noble and divine is always the cause by its own nature of what is better in the things that may be; what is not eternal may be and may have a share in both the worse and the better. Soul is better than body—that is, the animate, by virtue of soul, is better than the inanimate—and being better than not being—that is, living better than not living. Because of these reasons there is generation among living things. For since it is impossible that the nature of such a class be eternal, what is generated is eternal in the way that it may be. It is impossible to be so as an individual, . . . but it is possible for it as a kind. That is why there is always a family of humans and animals and plants. (*Generation of Animals* 2.1, 731b24–732a1)

There is thus for Aristotle another mode in which we reach for divine being. It is in the activities by which we engender and raise the young, something, he observes in the *De Anima,* for whose sake animals do all that they do by nature, "in order that they might share in the eternal and the divine in the way in which they can" (*De Anima* 2.4, 415a30–415b1). This is an *eros* like the Platonic *eros* that nature has for its own perfected Form, but disposed diachronically in substance's desire to reproduce itself. The emulation of divinity thus takes place in Aristotle's view not only in the activity of thinking, but in the activity of reproduction as well, in the complex biological, social, and in our case, political and cultural acts by which substances pass on to their progeny the bounded activity of their mortal lives.

8. Aristotle's Theology

In this discussion, I have reiterated our earlier theme that Aristotle's concern with substance is a concern not with a kind of thing, but with a mode of being, one that is the explanatory paradigm of being in general. I have also suggested that we are to understand his attention to divine substance similarly not as an attention to some particular thing in or out of the world, but as an attention to being as divine, and in particular, to a mode of being that is divine. Those of us drawn to such an attention may further believe that there is some entity that specially exhibits that very divine being (or several such entities), just as there are entities that exhibit substance, entities we call substances. But we need not.

In many traditions, such an entity is named, quasi-eponymously, after its mode of being. In most of the English-speaking world, for example, the being that many think exists and is a god (for many the only god) is called God. This is of course not a simple naming, nor is it accidental, any more than it is a happy accident that Mr. Toad of Toad Hall turns out to be a toad. Just so God (mutatis mutandis) may be addressed simply as God, or perhaps as Lord God, like His Majesty, The King.

But in other traditions, although that which is divine may have a proper name, or a name that reflects some other aspect of its being, it may also be referred to simply as *the divine* or *the divine ones,* or *the god* or *the godly*—the being or beings, in other words, that are divine or godly. And because this may refer to a specific god or merely to the divine as such, it is difficult to distinguish between reference to a divine being and reference to a mode or principle of being that may be thought of as divine. Such is the nature of Aristotle's concern with "the divine" and, as I will suggest in a moment in somewhat more detail, with thinking that is divine.

So in Book 12 of the *Metaphysics,* Aristotle is occupied with a task that we might identify as a part of philosophical theology. It is a task that sets out to articulate the nature of divine being—being godly—independently of the question of who or what in fact is a god. It is only at the end of chapter 7 that he begins to speculate on the latter question, and only in chapter 8 that he turns briefly, in what must seem to the modern reader a strange excursus into astronomical theory, to providing a more detailed answer. At the end of that chapter he tells his reader that

> there has been handed down from the ancients who have gone before to those who have come later a tradition, in mythical form, that these [movers] are gods, and that the divine encompasses the whole of nature. All of the rest has been added as myth for the purpose of persuading the many and for its legal and practical use; they say that they are human in form and like certain other animals, and other things that follow from this and are like what we have said. But if one were to separate out from all this only the first point, that they thought the first substances were divine, we must consider them to have spoken divinely, and consider that while probably every art and philosophy has many times been developed as far as possible and then again perished, these beliefs have been preserved from them like relics until the very present. Only thus far is clear to us the ancestral belief that has come from those who were first. (*Metaphysics* 12.8, 1074b1–13)

What we here see is one model of the relation between theology and philosophical theology. Aristotle develops a theory of what divine being is, and then identifies as instances of such being entities that the historical tradition has taken to be divine. This strategy contrasts with one that reads theology out of a narrative account of the nature and history of the divine as inscribed in a religious tradition.

But on the account of philosophical theology I have attributed to Aristotle, it remains to be determined whether there in fact exists anything that exhibits divine being in a sense more immediate than that in which I suggested McCorquodale (for instance) may be said to do so. It remains, in other words, to be determined whether such being is exemplified other than immanently, whether in those mediate determinate instances of it that we call sensible substances, or in the order of which they are a part, the order that is the cosmos. This is the question known in subsequent philosophical discussion under the title "the existence of God."

This question can be answered, I think, only against the background of a prior question for philosophical theology: the question of what it is for such a divine being to be said to exist. This is a question that Aristotle never explicitly addresses, but perhaps that is because deeper philosophical presuppositions already shape his answer to it. He may see no

reason to consider the question because his ontology, despite its concern with platonism, remains so liberal, so generously realistic, and so untainted by frugal aversions to ontological commitment. To understand the principle by virtue of which animals exhibit the animate being that defines them is to know of the existence of *the soul;* here the distinction between immanent and transcendent has no purchase. Similarly, what more than what we already know about the world is required to know of the "existence of the divine?" It is a world in which to some there is divinity in the focus of many splendid complex and ordered centers of thought and action, to others in that world's generous self-presentation to awareness—to perception and to imagination and to thought—and to yet others in the fit and join of the world's parts to each other—the fact that, as Aristotle puts it, "all things are somehow ordered together—*πάντα συντέτακταί πως*" (*Metaphysics* 12.10, 1075a16). To some, though of course not to all, these or other features of the world may be enough to warrant seeing it with an aspect that can be called divine, and more likely enough to someone who, like Aristotle, has a generous and openhanded ontology.

CHAPTER 9

The Activity of Being

THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK I have urged we not lose sight of the original question of the *Metaphysics,* the question that the discussion of substance is meant to elucidate, the question concerning being. In Chapter 1, I noted that in Book 4 of the *Metaphysics* and again in the opening of Book 7, Aristotle describes his undertaking as the development of a general theory of being—a theory of being as such—but a theory that is to be realized by understanding the nature of substance. That a general ontology can be realized by understanding substance is possible because the unity of being is a unity of what Aristotle calls, near the beginning of Book 4 of the *Metaphysics,* "things said in reference to a single nature: *πρὸς ἕν or πρὸς μίαν φύσιν λεγόμενα*" (for example, *Metaphysics* 4.2, 1003a33–34), and that single nature is substance. The unity of being is achieved by the fact that all modes of being are to be understood in reference to the being of substance. That means that the *being* exhibited in *something's being what it is* and more specifically in *something's being what it is by virtue of itself* is the formal principle of being in general.

1. Remembering the Importance of Activity

Our story might be as simple as this: knowing that substance is the paradigmatic form of being, and understanding now that substance is *the activity of those things that are able to be fully what they are, being what they are,* we understand being. Being is the activity of things' being what they are. Understanding the connection between substance and *activity,* given the paradigmatic status of substance, helps us to see Aristotle's ontology as an ontology that portrays *being as activity.* In thus identifying substance as the activity of a subject's being what it is, this story reveals with clarity the ontological centrality of activity. It thus shows how misleading are depictions of Aristotle's ontology of substance as an ontology of *things,* of inert and static entities—depictions that often accompany a contrast, explicit or implicit, with theories thought to privilege a more active and dynamic view of being.

But think how seductive are views that picture Aristotle's ontology as a theory of things and their attributes. Such views occur, for one, when we think of the being of substance as a mere indeterminate capacity for the collection of attributes, or as an indeterminate placeholder for attached attributes, which attributes are the accidental features of a substance's being. This is an understanding of Aristotle's ontology that I discarded in Chapter 1; it is a view of substance dismissed by Aristotle himself, as we saw, early in Book 7 of the *Metaphysics* (*Metaphysics* 7.3, 1020a8–30). And it is an understanding, I think it fair to say, that is not held by anyone who has read the *Metaphysics* with care.

Again, think of our unconscious assimilation of substance to the being of an entity that, although in some respects independent and self-subsistent, is in fact an accidental unity. I have argued that an artifact like a lintel or a threshold or a Viking kitchen range is one instance of such accidental unity. Other nonsubstantive entities are accidental unities that may involve substances in more obvious ways: thus a *gray horse* is not a substance. Our thought that it might be is an instance of confusing the subsistent and material unity of things with the per se being and self-identity of substances.

These confusions occur easily when, in thinking of substance, we think of the entities that exhibit substance, rather than of the substance

those entities exhibit. We think, when we do so, of Aristotle's discourse about substance as concerned with the material and actual condensate of the activity that is substance. We fail in such thinking, as we do in thinking of substance as static, to recognize that Aristotle's is a theory of *being.*

And if we go on to picture substance simply as the determinate whatness of entities in static form, as the internal state of an entity distinguished from the entity's accidental attributes by the necessity of its belonging, we encounter the problems of explaining the unity of substantive being that concerns Aristotle throughout Books 7 and 8 of the *Metaphysics.* These are problems to which a solution is given, I have argued, in the developed theory of *energeia,* when we view substance as the complex union of potency and activity, a union best represented in the model of a power and its exercise. It is recognizing substance as activity that therefore enables a successful theory of substance as the paradigmatic form of being, and the failure to do so is a failure to understand being properly.

Our propensity for that failure, I argued at the beginning of this book, is evidenced by our translation of *energeia* as *actuality.* The misreading inherent in that translation may, of course, be subtle, and it is remediable. We could accustom ourselves to hearing once again the now-obsolete sense of *actual* and of *actuality* that has to do with the active and with activity. When Lady Macbeth's physician asks her attendant, "Besides her walking and other actual performances, what, at any time, have you heard her say?" (*Macbeth* V.1.13) he means by *actual* to contrast her *activities* like walking to what she might say. But our energies would be better spent accustoming ourselves to the sound of *activity.* For it is *activity* that most accurately renders the idea of being that is central to Aristotle's ontology.

But the question I set out to consider about substance in relation to being in general is, how? The entelic activities that make up the nature of specific instances of substance come to represent the activity of substance's being itself, and the activity of substance is then thought to constitute a principle of being in general, but how does it do so? How does substance, understood as activity, offer an understanding of being?

2. Rehearsing the Categories of Being

Consider again the relationship between substance and being's other categories identified in the work titled *Categories.* I have emphasized three features of that relationship. First and most obvious is the fact that substance is said explicitly to be the principle of the other categories of being. "Being is said," as Aristotle repeats at the opening of Book 7 of the *Metaphysics,* "in many senses (*τὸ ὄν λέγεται πολλαχῶς*)." But he then adds, as we will recall, that "although being is said in these many senses, it is clear that the primary mode of being is the what it is, which is precisely what signifies substance (*τὸ τί ἐστιν ὅπερ σημαίνει τὴν οὐσίαν*)" (*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028a13–14).

Second, as the subsequent argument of *Metaphysics* 7.1 makes clear, the importance of the priority that substance enjoys relative to the other categories is not limited to the ontological dependence that entities in those categories may have on some subject that is an instance of substance. What is more important is that the being of substance is the explanatory principle of the being of the other categories. The being of the other categories is explained in terms of the being of those things that most characteristically serve as subjects and are most suited to be subjects, the things that we call substances.

And the reason that substance exhibits that priority over the other categories is several-fold: (a) Substance is designated by *the what it is,* by *τὸ τί ἐστιν.* It therefore represents the principle of items in each of the other categories *being what they are.* (b) Items in the other categories, however, are what they are only in a qualified sense, and the qualification is because an item in a category other than substance is what it is only insofar as it is (finally) the attribute of some substantial being. (This is the respect in which ontic dependency becomes important.) Colors are what they are, and locations are what they are; but what they are are the colors of horses and humans, and the locations of hawks and hounds. (c) It is because they qualify substance that they are qualified in the way they are; thus the red of copper is red in only the way copper is red and differently from the way in which a young person's hair may be red or a sorrel horse red.

Third and finally, this relationship and the distinction on which it is founded hold specifically between the *being of substance* and *the other*

modes of being indicated by the categories; a further relationship is that between substance and accidental being. In Chapter 1, I pointed out that the *Metaphysics* differentiates among these three kinds of being:

- *accidental being:* being in which a subject is what it happens to be or, in other words, is accidentally—*κατὰ συμβεβηκός*: *a horse's being gray,* for example;
- *nonsubstantial being by virtue of itself:* being in which a subject is what it is per se or by virtue of itself—*καθ᾽ αὑτό*—but in a category other than substance: *the color gray's being gray,* for example, or *a three-pound weight's weighing three pounds;* and
- *substantial being by virtue of itself:* being in which a subject is what it is by virtue of itself—*καθ᾽ αὑτό*—in the category of substance, that is, *ousia: Lady Suffolk's being a horse,* for example.

We often, I noted, refer to the predicates in the second category as instances of accidental being as well, as it is the fact of their belonging to a subject different from them that constitutes the accidental being of the first category. But we must then be careful not to confound the distinctions, or to misunderstand their relationships. Above all, we need to be clear that for the purposes of the *Metaphysics,* as Aristotle makes clear in Book 5 (*Metaphysics* 5.7, 1017a8–27), the first kind of being is contrasted with the second and third kinds. The latter two are different modes of being by virtue of itself; the first is accidental being in the strict sense. These facts together, as we have just recalled, should help us see beyond the more intuitive grouping by which we contrast ordinary independent and self-subsistent things like thresholds, houses, statues, and horses with such things as colors, sounds, and locations. They should remind us of the respect in which horses are more like colors than they are like houses. For as with other artifacts, the matter that is a house is not a house by virtue of itself, but by virtue of a certain form to which the matter stands in some merely accidental relationship. Stones must be made into a house by some causal agency that in some mode entertains the form of house, a form that stones qua stones merely happen to exemplify. Stones are, to be sure, potentially a house, but they do not become a house by virtue of themselves.

(This fact is connected with Aristotle's description of living things as containing their own principles of motion, change, and growth.)

But horses and colors are alike in being what they are—with qualifications that we have noted and to which I will return—by virtue of themselves, and they both contrast with accidental beings like houses and thresholds. Unless we attend to this similarity and to this contrast, we will be led into thinking that there is no important ontological distinction between a house and a horse, and then into thinking that there is also no important ontological distinction between a horse and a gray horse. And we will be encouraged in this error by an ontology that recognizes no important ontological differences among beings that are numerically identical. Then, because in the case of a particular gray horse the horse and the gray horse are one and the same individual thing, it may appear to us that if one is an instance of substance, the other must be as well. In this way we will be led to think of a gray horse as an instance of substance, as though, once again, substance were a category of *thing* rather than a category of the *being of things*.

Such an ontology, I argued, is not Aristotle's. Central to his thought is the fact that numerical identity is not the same thing as equivalence of being. Thus his repeated observation that several beings, determined by the alternative descriptions of a single individual, may be *one in number* but *different from one another in their being*—ἐν ἀριθμῷ, as Aristotle frequently puts it, τὸ δ' εἶναι ἕτερον. A being that is determined by one description may differ from a being that is determined by another, even though the descriptions designate one and the same individual. So it is that although in a particular case, a horse and a gray horse might be one and the same entity, the respective beings of the one individual determined by *horse* and by *gray horse* are not identical; for *being a gray horse* and *being a horse* are not identical. It does not therefore follow from the fact that a horse is a substance that a gray horse is a substance. The reason it does not follow is precisely because substance, as I have argued, is a category of *being*. A gray horse—that is, a horse qua gray horse—is thus not an instance of substance even though that very horse qua *horse* is. *The horse,* that is to say, is an instance of something unqualifiedly being what it is and being what it is by virtue of itself; the gray horse is not.

So *being a gray horse* is not an instance of something's being what it is by virtue of itself. Although a gray horse is a single entity, it is the site of two beings—*being a horse* and *being gray*—that happen to have come together—*συμβεβηκέναι*—in one entity, and it is only by the co-incidence of these two beings that the horse is gray. The accidental being of *a gray horse* is this *συμβεβηκέναι*—we might say this *co-incidence*—the having come together of something's being a horse and something's being gray.

This lengthy reminiscence thus brings us back to the question with which we began. I recalled the distinction among three modes of being not in order to rehearse these earlier arguments, but as part of our thinking about substance as a principle of being: how does the third kind of being, the being *καθ᾽ αὑτό* of substance, represent a formal principle of being in general?

3. How Substance Is the Principle of Being

There are two parts to this answer, and the first is clear. Substance is the principle of the second category of being I distinguished a moment ago, the being *καθ᾽ αὑτὸ* of the categories other than substance. This is a relationship that we repeatedly witnessed earlier, and it is a priority I briefly argued for at the beginning of the last section. Most importantly, I said that substance, as preeminently that which is what it is, represents the principle of items in each of the other categories *being what they are,* a principle, I venture to repeat, that operates through the agency of a substance's *being what it is,* and not its *constituting an ontic subject.*

The second part of the answer is less clear. For it is not obvious that substance is the principle of being *κατὰ συμβεβηκός*; that is, it is not obvious that it is the principle of the accidental being displayed in, to use Aristotle's example from *Metaphysics* 5, an *ἄνθρωπος* being *μουσικός*—a human being's being cultured (*Metaphysics* 5.7, 1017a9). This is especially true in light of the fact that the priority Aristotle specifies is not an ontological priority of subjects to the properties of those subjects, but a priority of understanding. So while it may be clear that substance as the principle mode of a thing's being what it is can serve as the principle of a color's being what it is or a location's being what it is, how can it serve as the principle of a man's being cultured? Cultured is

precisely not *what* a man is by virtue of himself; he merely happens to be cultured. So how could substance be a principle of such being?

Here is an answer that the threefold distinction I set out may help reveal. While substance is the principle of being *κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς*, the relationship is not immediate, but indirect. Think of Aristotle's thought as involving several moments. (1) Accidental being of the form *S is P* is the co-incidence of two instances of being, something being S and something being P. (2) In each of these instances of being, a subject is what it is by virtue of itself. (3) The paradigm instance and thus explanatory principle of such being-by-virtue-of-itself is substance, being in which a subject is *unqualifiedly* what it is by virtue of itself. So substance is the principle of per se being, and per se being the site of the coincidence that constitutes accidental being. Substance, we might say, is the principle *κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς* of accidental being.

A human being is cultured. Two instances of being, each of which is an instance of per se being, of being *καθ᾽ αὑτό*, come together—*συμβεβηκέναι*: something being a human being, and something being cultured. In fact, they co-incide; they are one and the same individual in the very sense in which *a human being* and *a cultured human being* are one and the same individual. They are the same in number, as Aristotle frequently puts it, although their being is different—*ἐν ἀριθμῷ τὸ δ᾽ εἶναι ἕτερον*. One of them is an instance of substance, and as such is the principle of the other. And so the substance—something's being a human being—is *κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς* cultured, which that thing under another description—cultured thing—is per se. Here is how I expressed this constellation of being earlier: a human being is human by virtue of himself, and the cultured is cultured by virtue of itself; but it is only by virtue of his being the same person as the cultured person that he is cultured.

The first moment of Aristotle's thought, the principle that the beings in question are per se beings—are *καθ᾽ αὑτὸ* what they are—becomes clear when we recall the scope and force of his description of what is said to be by virtue of itself:

> Things said to be by virtue of themselves (*καθ᾽ αὑτὸ*) are just those indicated by the categories of predicates; for being has just as many senses as there are these categories. Since among things predicated,

> some signify what a subject is, others its quality, others quantity, others relation, others acting or being acted upon, others place, others time, being signifies what corresponds to each of these. (*Metaphysics* 5.7, 1017a23–27)

The second moment, the thought that substance is the principle of such per se being, is equally clear. It is what I just indicated when I characterized the relationship between the second and the third kinds of being distinguished near the beginning of the last section; there I once again urged that we read the primacy of substance to the other categories as due to the fact that understanding substance will allow us to understand them. This is clear from our reading of Aristotle's argument in *Metaphysics* 7.1; he there argues that "we think we know each thing most fully, when we know of a human or of fire what it is, rather than its quality or quantity or place, since we know each of these very things also when we know what the quality or the quantity is" (*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028a36–1028b3). Aristotle might have claimed, as I argued, that we know the quality of something when we know the underlying substance in which the quality inheres and of which it is predicated; this picture is sometimes ascribed to Aristotle, and it may be something with which he would agree. But in fact his argument for the priority is somewhat different; for what is required in addition is that we understand the being that characterizes substance, the being by which a thing is what it is by virtue of itself.

Concerning this being by which a thing is what it is, we read in *Metaphysics* 7.4,

> What something is (*τὸ τί ἐστιν*) signifies in one sense substance and a particular something, but in another each of the ways of being predicated, quantity, quality, and the like. For just as *is* (*τὸ ἔστιν*) belongs to all things, not, however, in the same sense, but to one sort of thing primarily and to others in a secondary and dependent sense, so also *what something is* (*τὸ τί ἐστιν*) belongs unqualifiedly to substance, and to other things in a qualified sense. For even of a quality we might ask what it is, so that quality also is what something is, but not unqualifiedly. (*Metaphysics* 7.4, 1030a18 26)

The *being by which a thing is what it is,* therefore, exhibits the same focused homonomy, the same unity of different senses all said in reference to a single sense, as does being in general. It is this being—the being that states *what a subject is* and whose range mirrors that of being *καθ ̓αὑτὸ*, being that is said of a subject by virtue of itself—that serves as the link between *ousiology,* the understanding of substance, and *ontology,* the understanding of being in general.

It may interest us to think how formally similar is the structure of accidental being on Aristotle's understanding and on that of a platonic ontology. For in the latter the fact that a human being is cultured could be referred to the facts that a *human being* participates in a Form, as does *being cultured,* and these Forms are capable of somehow being intertwined in discourse in such a way as to allow us to say that *the man is cultured.* A *cultured man* is the ontic correlate of that discursive fact. Plato seems to have given consideration to an account like this, for example, in the *Sophist*'s theory of predicative discourse as the weaving together of forms with one another—*ἡ ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴ* (*Sophist* 259e).

But on this account, it is only by virtue of some relation to a being different from and prior to and independent of a man or of being cultured, that such a being as a cultured person can be said to be what it is. Aristotle, on the other hand, is committed, as I have repeatedly urged, to a theory of being at the heart of which is the recognition that something like a human being is what it is *καθ ̓αὑτὸ*: by virtue of itself.

It is of course true that it is only *qua human* that an individual human being is what it is. That fact is correlative to an important fact I emphasized earlier. Aristotle's prime examples of substance, the descriptions under which he first introduces us to substance early in the *Categories* and in terms of which he continues to discuss substance, are not Socrates and Lady Suffolk. They are *this particular human being—ὁ τὶς ἄνθρωπος*—and *this particular horse—ὁ τὶς ἵππος*. It is true to say that *Socrates is a substance* because the name *Socrates* refers to a particular human being, and a particular human being is a four-square instance of substance being. But *Socrates* is also the name of a short, bearded philosopher, and nothing under that description is a substance. It is not therefore Socrates that is a substance, but Socrates qua human being; not Lady Suffolk, but Lady Suffolk qua horse.

But the distinction between a platonic account and that of Aristotle remains; what I suggested was critically different in the platonic account was the fact that each subject, to be what it is, must bear some relation to a being different from and prior to and independent of it. But it is that very absence of independent and *καθ᾽ αὑτὸ* being at the ontic level of individuals, an independence of being that makes its appearance only at the formal level, that distinguishes a platonic account. On Aristotle's account the human being that Socrates must be to be what he is is not something prior to and different from him, not something in relation to which he stands. Being human is just what he is.

4. The Unity of Accidental Being

So Lady Suffolk's being the color that she is (to return to our old gray mare) is not an instance of something's being what it is by virtue of itself. Although a gray horse is a single entity, it is the site of two beings—*being a horse* and *being gray*—that happen to have come together—*συμβεβηκέναι* is the term Aristotle uses—in one entity, and it is only by the becoming one of these two beings that the horse is gray. The accidental being of *a gray horse* is this *συμβεβηκέναι*—we might say this *co-incidence*—the having come together of something's being a horse and something's being gray.

Once again, this ontological fact that I am trying to reveal is not about Lady Suffolk except accidentally. Our intuitions are right in suggesting to us that it is not as though *that particular nag* could have been a different color.[1] What Aristotle is talking about when he says that a human being is *κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς* cultured or a horse *κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς* gray is a fact about human beings and horses, or we can say a fact about Abrams qua human being or about Lady Suffolk qua horse.

I have offered this account of accidental being explained by invoking two instances of per se being as the second part of the answer to the question, why does Aristotle think that substance is a principle of being? It is not difficult to see that as an explanation this account may seem circular, for the fact that Lady Suffolk is gray is accounted for only when we add to the per se beings that we invoke the additional fact of the coincidence of those two beings. We need, in other words, to add the identity—an

identity that we might think is central to an explanation of the horse's being gray—between the thing that is a horse and the thing that is gray. Alternatively, we can express this as the union of the beings that are together incarnate in a single entity, the entity Lady Suffolk.

They exist together, as I have suggested, because they have come together, and this is the sense of the verb *συμβεβηκέναι* in its several forms, including most notably the form *κατὰ συμβεβηκός*, accidental. Beings that are accidental have come together to coinhabit a single individual entity, in this instance the gray horse, Lady Suffolk. So the structure of an instance of being that is like Lady Suffolk's being gray includes not only the two instances of being *καθ᾽ αὑτὸ* we mentioned but also the accidental being that is the having come together of horse and color. Aristotle expresses this fact with characteristic pith: "For what it means for this to be that is for this to have come together with that (*τὸ γὰρ τόδε εἶναι τόδε σημαίνει τὸ συμβεβηκέναι τῳδε τόδε*)" (*Metaphysics* 5.7, 1017a11). So here the elements of a state of being like Lady Suffolk's being gray are attended to: the instances of per se being—being *καθ᾽ αὑτὸ*—whose being is the self-expression of that which is what it is by virtue of itself and, crucially, the having come together—the *συμβεβηκέναι*—which is the characteristic ontological achievement of the world's complex individuals.

But we need to realize that this latter part of the explanation of Lady Suffolk's being gray is not the object of the science of *ontology.* For the explanation of that fact, which is just the fact that *the color of that horse, Lady Suffolk, is gray,* lies elsewhere, and the account that ontology provides is, as it were, accidental to it. Insofar as the fact that *the color of that horse is gray* is about some horses or horses in general being gray, it is explained in part by the science of horses, in part by the more general biological principles of animal coloring, and in part by a general scientific theory of chromatics. And insofar as it is about this horse in particular, about Lady Suffolk being gray, it will be explained by the series of historical causes that led to the horse happening to be gray. Some of these causes will involve some part of what it is to be a horse; others may be true always or for the most part by reason of some other feature of the world. But some will involve the mere happenstance of the historical: what happens to be the case. So together these causes will explain the

accidental; that is, they will tell the story of why things happen to have fallen out as they have.

What I have just said about predications like *the color of the horse is gray* is true only insofar as the referring phrase (here *the color of the horse*) is intended, as we discussed in Chapter 5, to indicate the color of the horse whatever that color might be. It is true only when that phrase is used *attributively*. In such a case, to say that the color of the horse is gray is to say no more than that the horse is gray. Where this is true, the fact that the color of the horse is gray is therefore explained by the sciences and historical narratives appropriate to accounting for such a particular and accidental fact: that animals of this sort, or that such and such an animal, is such and such a color or that that very animal happens to be that very color. These explanations are not the domain of first philosophy.

But if *the color of the horse* is used not attributively, but referentially—if it refers opaquely to a particular color, in this case to the gray of horses like Lady Suffolk—then to say that the color of the horse is gray is not to predicate an attribute of an independent subject, but merely to identify a color as gray: it is to say just what the color (gray) is. It is only in this sense that the color of the horse being gray is explained *directly* by substance, that is, explained by the mode of being exemplified in a horse being a horse, and it is only in this sense that such a fact is immediately within the domain of first philosophy.

The concern of that science—the science that Aristotle says is concerned with the nature of being qua being—is with the necessary structures of being exhibited in being in general: even, we now see, in cases of accidental being, even if there only accidentally. And with respect to these structures of being, the most authoritative formal principle is that mode of being in which something is what it is by virtue of itself, a mode of being exhibited most paradigmatically in substance, above all in animals being what they are, and secondarily and qualifiedly in such cases of being by virtue of itself as of a certain color being the color that it is. Everything is what it is, even if only substances are what they are unqualifiedly, and even if only the subjects of categorical being are just what they are. It is the recognition of this fact that allows the understanding of being in general to be achieved by an understanding of substance.

5. Being and Determinacy

Note how the principal themes of our discussion have now come together. For it is this being—a thing's being what it is—that the *Metaphysics* is devoted to understanding; that work's central narrative is devoted to an analysis of what such being involves and of how it is (problematically but importantly) related to the characteristic determinacy and further determinability of substance. But this analysis depends upon a recognition that I have repeatedly urged: the recognition that substance is not a category of thing but a category of being and that the primacy of substance in Aristotle's ontology and its explanatory power depend upon that fact.

In addition, that analysis culminates, as we have seen, in the revelation in Book 9 of the centrality of *energeia*—of activity; for it is this centrality, I have argued, that ultimately allows Aristotle to hold to both defining aspects of substance. It is because the being of substance is understood on the model of energeia that it enjoys both determinacy—the fact that a substance is what it is and has an essence—and determinability—the fact that a substance more than any other being is capable of being further determined, the fact, in other words, that substance is a paradigm of being a subject.

A further and equally defining feature of Aristotle's ontology and of the argument of the *Metaphysics* concerns their relationship; for determinacy is a condition of determinability, having an essence a condition of being a subject. I have alluded to this feature of Aristotle's thought on several occasions. Perhaps its clearest expression, recall, is in the *Categories,* where Aristotle characterizes substance's "most unique characteristic" as its ability to remain one and the same individual while taking on contrary attributes.

So by understanding it as *energeia,* Aristotle is enabled to see substance both as subject—*ὑποκείμενον*—and as essential nature—*τί ἦν εἶναι*—not as one thing standing in relation to another, but as that which is what it is by virtue of itself: indeed as the paradigm of per se being. And as such—as the paradigm of *καθ' αὑτό* being—substance serves as the principle of the being of the categories—and thus as the principle of being in general. So in a sense it is substance's role as the subject of which

being is predicated that affords it the position of centrality it plays in Aristotle's ontology; but this is true, as it were, accidentally, *κατὰ συμβεβηκός*. For it is not *immediately* its role as first subject that gives to substance its explanatory force; it is what is revealed by its ability to serve as first subject—namely the fact that it is by virtue of itself what it is—that does. This is what I meant a moment ago when I cited as a tenet of Aristotle's ontology the fact that determinacy is a condition of determinability, having an essence a condition of being a subject.

6. An Ontology of Being

It is, it would seem, a strange thought that I now put forward, the thought that Aristotle's ontology is an ontology of being, strange and perhaps silly. For how oddly pleonastic is the phrase *an ontology of being;* we might as well speak of *the big El Rio Grande river,* or the *old Ponte Vecchio bridge.* For with what else than with being would an ontology be concerned? But in so describing Aristotle's ontology, I am asking that we attend to the distinction I have been drawing between the notion of *entity* and that of *being,* a distinction roughly equivalent to Heidegger's *ontological difference* between beings and the being of those beings.[2] I hope that when we do so, the phrase may come to have a more recognizable force. The view I have been urging is one according to which ontology in Aristotle's sense is not so much a theory of *beings* as it is a theory of the *being* of those beings.

Reading ontology in this manner is in no way original with Aristotle. It is certainly central to the project of early Greek philosophy, and it is central as well to Plato's ontology. Consider, for example, the argument of the *Theaetetus.* What goes wrong with each of the suggested accounts of understanding in that dialogue is its attempt to picture understanding as the relationship between a conscious subject and an object understood as a thing, rather than as the subject's grasp of an object as a structure of being, a grasp that, as the dialogue shows, revealingly depends on judgment—*δόξα*—whose object is being—*ousia* (*Theaetetus* 186).

What is striking in Aristotle, however, is his recognition of the connection between a project of ontology so construed and an ontology that, like his, places the notion of activity—of being in its full gerundive and

verbal force—at the center of its analysis. What is remarkable about Aristotle is that the theory of being should so clearly be recognized as a theory of *being*. This is what I have meant by characterizing Aristotle's ontology as one in which a central and governing concept is that of *the activity of being*.

The recognition of that fact, it seems to me, invites us to look back into our Aristotle and rethink our understanding of some of the basic notions of his ontology, as well as of other areas of the corpus. It might also invite us as to ask, as historians of western philosophy, what it is that has subsequently led us to represent Aristotle's ontology as an ontology whose central concepts concern change and the diachronic fortunes of possibility and actuality, rather than being and the modalities of power and expression—as an ontology of things to which essential predicates belong, rather than as an ontology of instances of being actively expressing their essential nature. What has happened in our reading of Aristotle to lead us away from the centrality of activity?

7. Activity and Being

I have argued that the principal strategy of the Metaphysics may be described this way: insofar as the self-directed activities that constitute the being of substances come to represent the activity of being that itself *is* substance, so activity comes to represent being in general. We may experience some dissatisfaction with an act of representation of this sort as a mode of metaphysical explanation at the heart of the *Metaphysics*. But such dissatisfaction would be, it seems to me, the mark of that kind of philosophical philistinism that Aristotle terms *ἀπαιδευσία*—not having been properly brought up. Aristotle offers *ἀπαιδευσία* as the reason why some folks require a demonstration of the principle that it is impossible that the very same thing at the same time both belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect; he ridicules it as an ignorance of what does and does not require demonstration, here an ignorance of what sort of explanation it is reasonable to expect in first philosophy (*Metaphysics* 4.4, 1006a6). When philosophical generalization proceeds to first principles, what more could we hope to achieve than a successful representation? We may, of course, decide to eschew the

entire enterprise, but if we choose to participate, then we have to be satisfied with the kind of results that analysis achieves. In this respect, positivists are rather like philosophical iconoclasts; they prefer that first principles not be represented at all to the risk of the mere or inadequate or even transgressive representation that is the necessary lot of the icon.

But if we resolve to enter the halls of metaphysics, then we must be prepared for the necessary arrogance of synecdoche, that perplexing trope in which a whole is figured by a part, whose being as a part depends upon its not being the whole that it is called upon to figure. Metaphysics, which by its very project of explanation is doomed to traffic in global synecdoche, calling upon this or that part of being to figure being as a whole, cannot be free of this arrogance. We may develop an array of strategies or theories by which to deal with it, but we cannot hope to talk about *being* and escape it. So if Aristotle appeals to a specific mode of being, *activity,* in representing being as a whole, this merely marks the fact that *energeia* joins such Aristotelian terms of art as his terms for form and matter—*μορφή*, *εἶδος* and *ὕλη*—or indeed his term for substance—*οὐσία*. These terms have been translated from their local domains to do work in the high and airy courts of first philosophy. Such translation is an inescapable feature of the project of edification in the *Metaphysics,* which of necessity looks to a particular feature of being to represent being in general. Any governing trope in terms of which we choose to figure being so understood will of necessity be transgressive in this way. But it will equally carry not merely rhetorical but conceptual force as well; "the tendency, the thrust, points to something," as Wittgenstein once remarked about language that overflows the facts it tries to express.[3]

We too easily read the ruling concepts of Aristotle's metaphysics as those of change and becoming rather than of being, of the potentiality to be other rather than of the power for self-expression, and of the contrast and connection between the possible and the real rather than between power and its exercise. My argument in these pages has been that such readings prove subtly misleading, and that for a correct understanding of his ontology, we would do well to listen more attentively to Aristotle's choice of *activity* as the ruling concept of ontology.

Notes

PREFACE

1. Aryeh Kosman, "Substance, Being and *Energeia:* The Argument of *Metaphysics Theta,*" in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 2 (1984): 121–149.
2. Benjamin Jowett, for example, begins his translation of that dialogue in *The Dialogues of Plato Translated into English with Analyses and Introductions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892), 1:3–38, repr. in the widely used edition *Plato's Dialogues,* Bollingen Series 71, ed. Huntington Cairns (New York: Pantheon Press, 1961), 99–122, with the remark "The subject of the *Charmides* is Temperance or *σωφροσύνη*, a peculiarly Greek notion, which may also be rendered Moderation, Modesty, Discretion, Wisdom, without completely exhausting by all these terms the various associations of the word," which leads Cairns to the stronger reflection that "the [Greek] word cannot be translated by any one English word." Sure enough, in Jowett's translation, the virtue under discussion appears sometimes as *temperance,* sometimes as *wisdom.* Readers of other Platonic dialogues will find it in other English guises, among them *moderation, self-control,* and *harmony.* The problem is, to be sure, a general one; much the same variety of translation of *σωφροσύνη* into English marks versions of Euripides's *Hippolytus.*
3. This is how I translated *ἐπιστήμη* in "Understanding, Explanation, and Insight in the Posterior Analytics," in *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos,* ed. Edward Lee, Alexander Mourelatos, and Richard Rorty (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1973); the translation was later specifically and ably argued for by Myles Burnyeat in "Aristotle on Understanding Knowledge," in *Aristotle on Science: The "Posterior Analytics,"* ed. Enrico Berti (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1981), 97–139.

4. I have written more generally about the question of the translation of Aristotle in an essay entitled "Translating Being," soon to appear in a collection of my essays.
5. A study of particular interest that has emerged since I initially argued for this translation is that of Jonathan Beere, *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Beere's study is a persuasive argument for rendering *energeia* as *activity;* much that is convincing in his interpretation follows from that translation. By way of contrast, in *Aristotle, Metaphysics Book Θ,* trans. with an intro and commentary by Stephen Makin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), Makin continues to follow the translation of *energeia* as *actuality.*
6. S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 1.12, *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Volume 7,* ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 232. "In the perusal of philosophical works I have been greatly benefited by a resolve, which, in the antithetic form and with the allowed quaintness of an adage or maxim, I have been accustomed to word thus: '*until you understand a writer's ignorance, presume yourself ignorant of his understanding.*'"
7. The description is by Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Inferno,* Canto 4.131. I am also fond of Stephen Dedalus's "Bald he was, and a millionaire." James Joyce, *Ulysses,* (Paris: Shakespeare and co., 1922) 37. Bald after Diogenes Laertes, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers,* 5.1.1, but why a millionaire?

1. BEING AND SUBSTANCE

1. This is the term that Aristotle uses, for example, at *Metaphysics* 6.1, 1026a30 and *Metaphysics* 11.4, 1061b19. He also calls it *theology,* for example, at *Metaphysics* 6.1, 1026a19, by which he means the science that studies being qua divine. The name *metaphysics* may have first been introduced by Aristotle's editor Andronicus of Rhodes. It is thought that this may be because Andronicus placed a collection of essays we now call the *Metaphysics* after (*μετά*) the *Physics.*
2. I intend therefore to understand first philosophy objectively, that is, in terms of its object. Aristotle also speaks this way, defining *first philosophy* as the philosophy of first things. Terence Irwin follows him in this practice in *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 4–6. But Irwin understands the object as *principles* of philosophy rather than as *being;* so H. Bonitz, in *Index Aristotelicus* (Berlin: G.Reimeri, 1870; repr., Graz: Akademische Druck U. Verlagsanstalt, 1955), 653a23, where first philosophy is said to be philosophy concerning what is first: the divine, the unmoving, and the inseparable (*ἡ ϑλοσοϑία περὶ τὰ πρῶτα, θεῖα, ἀκίνητα, ἀχώριστα*). We will see the respects in which Bonitz is correct.
3. The choice of *substance* as the primary mode of being is not as arbitrary and tendentious as it sounds. The Greek *ousia*—*οὐσία*—of which *substance* is the translation is indeed a form of the verb *εἶναι*—to be—and has as much right as the participle *ὄν* to be rendered as *being.* It is its translation as *substance* that is the tendentious move.
4. I have borrowed this term from Heidegger, who uses it in a similar fashion to mark the distinction between, as he puts it, *seiende* and *sein,* between beings and their be-

ing: Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Frankfurt: Klosterman, 1975), 322. There is clearly a family resemblance between this distinction and that drawn by Montgomery Furth between (what he calls) *The Population Problem* and what he refers to simply as questions concerning the nature of substance. Different readers will be more comfortable with one or the other of these distinctions. Montgomery Furth, *Substance, Form, and Psyche: An Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 54–58.

5. This remark reveals what I noted in the Preface: my understanding of Books 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 12 as forming a more or less coherent and continuous argument concerning being and substance, of which Books 1 and 3 are more or less historical and introductory.
6. The final sentence of this passage may alternatively be translated: "For if someone were to reply to the question, what is it for each of these things to be animate? he would reply in each case with an account peculiar to that case." Later, in Chapter 7, I will suggest a reason that might recommend this translation.
7. This sense of oddness is not wholly fanciful; consider, by noticing the differences between *Eudemian Ethics* 1.7, 1217b34–35 and *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.6, 1096b27–31, the indications that Aristotle in fact once thought that there could be no science of being as such: on this, see above all G. E. L. Owen's highly influential article, "Logic and Metaphysics in Some Earlier Works of Aristotle," in *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century: Papers of the Symposium Aristotelicum Held at Oxford in 1957,* ed. Ingeman Düring and G. E. L. Owen (Gotenborg: Elanders Botryckeri Aktlebolag, 1960), 163–190. A more textured view, however, of this issue is in Christopher Shields, *Order in Multiplicity: Homonymy in the Philosophy of Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 220–225.
8. As, for example, at *Metaphysics* 4.2, 1003a33–34. This unity has come to be known as that of *focal meaning;* the term is due to Owen's widely discussed essay noted above. See also Terrence Irwin, "Homonymy in Aristotle," *Review of Metaphysics* 34, no. 3 (March, 1981): 523–544. Later discussions can be found in Julia Ward, *Aristotle on Homonymy: Dialectic and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Christopher Shields, *Order in Multiplicity*.
9. *Metaphysics* 4.2, 1005a32–1005b1; *Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028a10–31.
10. See, for example, the list of scholars cited by Joseph Owens in support of this claim in *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian "Metaphysics"* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 153, 375n30.
11. Of course, words like *ψυχή* or *soul* may at any given historical moment have accrued so much conceptual baggage that we will want to leave them behind in favor of more neutral terms. Surely something like this has happened (for better or worse) with respect to *soul* in our age. But that is a different question of rhetorical strategy from the one we are here addressing.
12. A more apt analogy might be the relation of *παρουσία*, presence, to *παρών*, being present, or perhaps the relationship reflected in the metonymy that leads to *γερουσία*, senate, from *γέρων*, elder.
13. These remarks are by Ross in his edition of the *Metaphysics,* W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary,* 2 vols. (Oxford:

Oxford University Press, 1924), 1:310. Christopher Kirwan translates: "in another sense, any constituent of such things . . . which is cause of their being, as for instance the soul in the case of an animal." Christopher Kirwan, *Aristotle's Metaphysics, Books Gamma, Delta and Epsilon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 41.

14. Thomas Aquinas seems clear about this fusion of example and analogy in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* when he writes that "it is not extrinsic to them like an efficient cause, but is intrinsic like a form. It is in this sense that the soul is called the substance of an animal." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics,* Book 5, Lesson 10, §899.
15. The literature on Book 7 as well as on 8 is extensive, some of it more in agreement with the view I want to be arguing for, some of it less. Articulate readings with extensive bibliographies for further reading are in Myles Burnyeat, *A Map of "Metaphysics" Zeta* (Pittsburgh: Mathesis, 2001); Michael Frede and Günther Patzig, *Aristoteles "Metaphysik Z": Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1988); Furth, *Substance, Form, and Psyche;* Mary Louise Gill, *Aristotle on Substance: The Paradox of Unity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); Charlotte Witt, *Substance and Essence in Aristotle: An Interpretation of "Metaphysics" VII–IX* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).
16. It is a view, however, that one finds not infrequently attributed to Aristotle. Here, for example, is how one scholar puts it, in an otherwise thoughtful essay on Wittgenstein: "An Aristotelian first substance . . . has no real properties, but it is that which can have real properties affirmed of it. It has neither shape, nor color, &c., because it is that to which we attribute shape, color, etc." James Griffin, *Wittgenstein's Logical Atomism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 71. G. E. M. Anscombe nicely states how wrongheaded this view is as an interpretation of Aristotle: "Because Aristotle distinguishes between substance and quality, those who take a predicate like 'man' to signify a complex of properties readily suppose him to be distinguishing between the being of a thing and the being of any attributes that it has. They then take the thing itself to have no attributes. It would be almost incredible, if it had not happened, to suppose that anyone could think it an argument to say: the ultimate subject of predication must be something without predicates: or that anyone who supposed this was Aristotle's view could do anything but reject it with contempt." G. E. M. Anscombe, *Three Philosophers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), 11.
17. In *Metaphysics* 7.7 and following. The argument of the *Physics* is much more complicated than this account suggests, particularly, as we will see, in terms of the relation between matter and privation as the sources *from which* of change. In the course of this book, I have systematically ignored those ambiguities that Aristotle refers to in the *Physics,* and so the analysis of matter sounds more general than it really is.
18. See, for example, *Metaphysics* 9.7, 1049a19–24.
19. I argue for this view in more detail in Chapter 5.
20. The progression of Aristotle's argument here is reminiscent of his historical remarks in the opening book of the *Metaphysics* 1.3, 983a26 and following.
21. Where else to go to for the clichés but Wikipedia? Here is what we find at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle: "Aristotle examines the concepts of substance and

essence *(ousia)* in his *Metaphysics* (Book VII), and he concludes that a particular substance is a combination of both matter and form."

22. *Parmenides* 132A–132B.
23. I have labeled that competing theory *platonic* with a small first letter to mark out my thought that it is not a view of Plato's. It is certainly a view that is considered in the Platonic dialogues (capital *P*), and it is certainly a view that followers of Plato and conversants of Plato held, but I do not think that it is the view Plato means for us to take away at the end of the afternoon.
24. So, for example, *Phaedo* 100C3: If anything else is beautiful besides Beauty Itself, its being beautiful is because of nothing other than because it partakes in that Beauty (*εἴ τί ἐστιν ἄλλο καλὸν πλὴν αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, οὐδὲ δι' ἓν ἄλλο καλὸν εἶναι ἢ διότι μετέχει ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ*).
25. So the abandoned distinction of the *Categories* 5, 2a13–19 between "first" and "second" substance.
26. See *On Generation and Corruption* 1.4, 319b7–24 and the relevant discussions in *De Anima,* for example, 2.1, 413a4–6.
27. Once we recognize the possibility of this admittedly peculiar way of speaking, the attractiveness of Aristotle's identification of substance with matter in *Metaphysics* 7.3, at which we will look later, becomes more evident.
28. The theory is applied to essence (*ὁ ὁρισμὸς ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ τί ἔστιν*) at *Metaphysics* 7.4, 1041a17–27.
29. Alan Code, "The Aporematic Approach to Primary Being in *Metaphysics* Z," in *New Essays on Aristotle,* ed. Francis Jeffry Pelletier and John King-Farlow, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* suppl. vol. 10 (1984): 1–20.

2. MOTION AND ACTIVITY

1. Here and throughout this book I presume to translate *energeia* by *activity.* I provide little by way of philological or historical argument in favor of that convention, but it is my hope, as I indicate in the Preface, that the interpretation of Aristotle's ontology that results from such a choice will be convincing. A long and detailed argument in favor of this translation of *energeia* may be found in Jonathan Beere's book *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
2. In his essay "*Kinesis* vs. *Energeia:* A Much-Read Passage in (but Not of) Aristotle's *Metaphysics,*" *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 34 (Summer 2008): 219–292, Myles Burnyeat argues that this distinction between kinesis and *energeia* does not form a part of the original discussion of *Metaphysics* 9. As an exercise in the use of learning and erudition to make fast our sense of the oddness of this passage in the context of its surrounding text, Burnyeat's is an extraordinary and even heroic essay. In itself, the possibility, and in light of Burnyeat's argument high probability, that the passage is an interloper raises little difficulty for the reading I am here offering of the passage and for the argument I am making about its place in Aristotle's thought; it is quite conceivable that the passage was introduced by Aristotle precisely

in light of the force I am here suggesting that it has. But Burnyeat also argues for a different understanding of the passage, and does so on the basis of a reading different from the reading I here offer. I think that his reading is mistaken, for reasons I will note at the beginning of Chapter 3.

3. J. L. Ackrill, for example, offers as an explication of what he calls "the force of Aristotle's point about present and perfect tenses" the alleged fact that "with energeiai he is *X*ing *entails* 'he has *X*ed'. The perfect can always be used of the period preceding a moment at which the present can be used." J. L. Ackrill, "Aristotle's Distinction between *Energeia* and *Kinesis,*" in *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle,* ed. R. Bambrough (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 122, 127. Although Terry Penner, in his essay "Verbs and the Identity of Actions—A Philosophical Exercise in the Interpretation of Aristotle," in *Ryle: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Oscar P. Wood and George Pitcher (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 393–460, offers an account that is on the whole correct, he describes the argument of 9.6 as providing a "tense test." See also A. P. D. Mourelatos, "Aristotle's 'Powers' and Modern Empiricism," *Ratio* 9 (1967): 97–104. For a fuller bibliography of literature on this issue, see Ronald Polansky, "*Energeia* in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* IX," *Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1983): 160–170.
4. Some linguists confine the use of the word *aspect* to refer only to internal temporal features of a described situation or action, in which case the perfect, as involving a more complex relation among actions and states, is considered separately. See Bernard Comrie, *Aspect: An Introduction to the Study of Verbal Aspect and Related Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 52–53. The important point is that it is not a simple tense marker, and that it is about completion in the sense I describe.
5. I say *standardly* because there may of course be constructions in which "I have seen" does have a preterit force: "I have seen him only once, and that was in 2001." But think of the oddness of "I have seen him up until 2004." I am sympathetic to Burnyeat's attempt to translate, as he puts it, so as "to counteract the English perfect's reference to the past": Burnyeat, "*Kinesis* vs. *Energeia,*" 251. But I think that his translations are awkward and misleading in other directions (for example, "*x* has seen *y* and *x* has [got] *y* in view"). I stay with the English perfect in the faith that it can be heard mainly to express aspect. Or that at least as interpreters of Aristotle, we can hear that. Burnyeat provides a discussion of aspect and references that will be of great help to readers interested in this point.
6. This is a lexical fact, that is, a fact about a class of verbs, not a morphological fact about the tense or aspect of a verb. It is to say that motion verbs are, as it were, lexically imperfective even though they may be morphologically perfect. The suggestion that activities cannot happen over time was made by Gilbert Ryle and followed by others; Ryle, *Dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 93–110, particularly 103f. Verbs that are perfective can be spread out over time; the important thing is that they be considered as a whole and at each moment complete. This was Ryle's mistake that led him to think of perfects as solely accomplishment verbs; he thought that the perfect must be like an aorist.

   Even if we were able to give a sense to a temporal rather than an aspectual reading of Aristotle's distinction, it would still be unclear why Aristotle might have

thought it important to make such a distinction here and in this context. For on this reading the distinction emerges as little more than a criterion for distinguishing motions from activities. What interest could such a criterion have at this moment in the argument of the *Metaphysics* that would justify the place it occupies in chapter 6 of Book 9?

7. We can put this differently by saying that Aristotle is distinguishing verbs that are lexically perfect and not just morphologically perfect.
8. I have in mind here again Ackrill, "Aristotle's Distinction between *Energeia* and *Kinesis,*" 121–142, who is concerned about such cases as I go on to discuss.
9. For "*ἔντελής εἶναι*—to be complete" means "*ἐν ἑαυτῷ τέλος ἔχειν*—to have *one's end within oneself,*" *just as* "*ἔνθεος εἶναι*—to be god-possessed" means "*ἐν ἑαυτῷ θέος ἔχειν*—to have a god within one." "Entelechy" was in common use until the twentieth century. So Frederick Dennison Maurice in *Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy* (London: Richard Griffon, 1854), 214, translates a rather famous sentence we will be looking at in a moment: "Motion is the entelechy (the perfecting power or principle) of the potential as potential."
10. See also *Physics* 8.5, 257b8; *Metaphysics* 9.6, 1048b29.
11. Similar versions are found in the same chapter at 201a29, 201b5, and 202a7 and at *Physics* 8.1, 251a9 and *Metaphysics* 11.9, 1065b16 and 1065b23. I have added the word *something* in brackets because here, as often in Aristotle, *is* is used as a predicate variable: *of what is able to be* means *of what is able to be such-and-such.*
12. Like Aristotle, I have been indiscriminate in my use of *building* and *being built,* although in a strict sense only *being built* should serve as an example. The reason for this will become clear.
13. W. D. Ross, *Aristotle* (London: Routledge, 1949), 81.
14. W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Physics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 537. One could multiply examples; Zeller, for instance, says that Aristotle means to define motion as "Verwirklichung . . . Bestimmtweren . . . Uebergang. . . . ," Eduard Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen entwicklung dargestellt* (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1919), 2:2,351.
15. Aquinas voices this objection to such an account, arguing that those who define motion as *exitus de potentia in actum* have committed a fallacy of definition, since *exitus* is itself a species of motion; *Commentaria in Octo Libros Physicorum Aristotelis* 3.1.2.2.
16. The only exception is at *Metaphysics* 11.9, 1065b16, where the excerpter who authored the latter part of Book 11 has, as at line 18, replaced *ἐντελέχεια* by *ἐνέργεια*. At *Physics* 8.1, 251a9, Ross follows Simplicius and reads *ἐνέργειαν*, but I see no reason to prefer this to the reading of *ἐντελέχεια* found in the majority of the manuscripts and in Themistius. But see George Blair's interesting study, "The Meaning of 'Energeia' and 'Entelecheia' in Aristotle," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (1967): 101–117. See also Blair, *Energeia and Entelecheia: "Act" in Aristotle* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1992).
17. See above, note 9. Cf. Ross's note at 1074a30 in W.D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 2:245.
18. The question is not one of confusion between these, as Daniel Graham supposes in "Aristotle's Definition of Motion," *Ancient Philosophy* 8 (1988): 209–215; it is rather

a question of whether or not the definition can succeed given the possibility of its capturing the wrong object. Graham's dismissal of the existence of a problem is difficult to understand given that Aristotle himself worries, as is clear from his raising the question in the passage I next quote, *Physics* 3.1, 201b9–13.

19. Ross *Aristotle's Physics,* 536 and with slight changes, Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics,* 2.327. The view is substantially that of Aquinas, *Commentaria in Octo Libros Physicorum Aristotelis* 3.1.2.3 and 5, and more recently of David Charles, in *Aristotle's Theory of Action* (London: Duckworth, 1984), 19; of Jonathan Beere, *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 204; and essentially of Robert Heinaman, "Is Aristotle's Definition of Motion Circular?" *Apeiron* 27 (1994): 25–37. If the question were simply one of what would count as a correct description of motion using Aristotelian concepts, this might do. But the question in fact is one of the correct interpretation of Aristotle's definition of motion. Being clear about this distinction goes a long way—though not all the way—in meeting one objection to a much earlier version of this interpretation, which I offered in Kosman, "Aristotle's Definition of Motion," *Phronesis* 14, no. 1 (1969): 41–62. Charles, for instance, in *Aristotle's Theory of Action*, 19, writes that "a schema for definition of processes might run: For any f, if f'ing is a process, then f*x* iff *x* has the potentiality for f'ing and *x*'s potentiality for f'ing is being actualized. . . . The account rests on there being a distinctive form of potentiality involved." Charles's schema would certainly generate descriptions of motions, but hardly Aristotle's definition. I said *not all the way* because what bothers Charles (and also bothers Jonathan Beere, *Doing and Being,* 204) is that the account I offer does not make a distinction between being potentially buildable and actively buildable. I think that is because I have not succeeded in making clear that it is an activity and not a condition or state that the accomplishment of motion represents. See note 26 below. Aristotle hides this fact somewhat by using *ἐντελέχεια* in the definition, but a general reading of *energeia* as activity and not actuality should go far in making this clear. Ursula Coope, whose interpretation is very much like mine, answers some of these concerns well in "Change and Its Relation to Actuality and Potentiality," in *A Companion to Aristotle,* ed. Georgios Anagnostopoulos (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 277–291.

20. Both of these definitions of motion were current among Aristotle's medieval commentators, some of whom took Aristotle to be defining *motus* as *exitus de potentia in actum,* others of whom took him to be defining it as *actus exeuntis de potentia in actum.* See Anneliese Maier, *Zwischen Philosophie und Mechanik* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1958), 3–57.

21. It is interesting that as clear minded a commentator as Ross should have been led into incompatibly offering both views; this is what Aristotle must mean when he describes motion as a very difficult and elusive thing to define.

22. See also *On Generation and Corruption* 1.4, 319b3–31 and *Metaphysics* 7.7, 1033a5–21. Although there is an important difference between the material and privative *terminis a quo,* which Aristotle here notes and elsewhere expands in the simple observation that statues are brazen, not bronze, caskets wooden, not wood (*Metaphys-*

ics 7.7, 1035a5–8; 9.7, 1049a19–24), the distinction here drawn is clearly related to that between form and matter. For the different senses of "of" in "the perfection or development of *x*" when *x* is the subject of that development and when *x* is the privation from which the development proceeds parallel what we might call the formal and material "of," as in "a statue of Pericles" and "a statue of bronze."

23. In a sense, this is only a version of a larger fact concerning the being of nonbeing that is argued for by the Stranger in the *Sophist* and invoked repeatedly by Aristotle throughout the *Metaphysics.* See, for example, *Sophist* 237, 256ff.; *Metaphysics* 7.4, 1030a20–27.
24. I suppose that there are reasons, which it might be fruitful to explore, why it feels natural for us to express this difference by saying that B speaks French and C is speaking French, whereas we should never say that B is speaking French, and only in special cases that C speaks French.
25. The version at *Physics* 3.1, 200b26f (which may have suffered from haplography) is simpler: "there is that which just actively is, and that which is both able to be and actively is."
26. In an earlier essay cited above, I thought it appropriate to say that the ability to be elsewhere became *actual* only when the journey was underway. This was understandably confusing, for it sounded as though I were claiming that prior to the journey there was no ability to be elsewhere. It is clearly right to object to such a view; this was the objection of David Charles in his *Aristotle's Philosophy of Action* (London: Duckworth, 1984), 19–20n11, which is followed by Jonathan Beere, *Doing and Being,* 204. What I then intended, and what here becomes clear merely by the retranslation of *energeia,* is that the ability becomes *active* only when the journey is underway. This means, as I here explain, that the ability is only then being *exercised.*
27. Ross, *Aristotle's Physics,* 536.
28. Appropriate action *or passion.* It is important to realize here that we are talking about activity—*energeia*—and not action—*praxis.* Therefore our contrast is with the former and not the latter.
29. Such as are explored throughout Books 5 and 6 of the *Physics.*
30. See also *Physics* 8.5, 257b9 and *Metaphysics* 9.6, 1048b29.

3. ACTIVITY AND SUBSTANCE

1. D. J. O'Connor, "Aristotle," in *A Critical History of Western Philosophy,* ed. D. J. O'Connor (New York: Free Press, 1964), p. 51.
2. What is a motion in one context may be thought of in another context as an activity carried out for its own sake; one may build to learn or to practice building. But building is nonetheless a concept dependent on what is being built, that is, on the building (the structure) that is the goal of building (the activity).
3. This contrast is connected to an opposition that appears earlier in Greek philosophical thought in the recognition that nature is a dialectical unity of hidden being and emergent appearance. The story of the differences between Plato and Aristotle

concerning the relative place that they give hiddenness and emergence, particularly in their ontologies, would, I think, be worth telling.

4. At 1048a35, I read "*θεωρῆσαι τόδε ἐνεργείᾳ*."
5. Myles Burnyeat's discussion ("*Kinesis* vs. *Energeia:* A Much-Read Passage in [but Not of] Aristotle's *Metaphysics,*" *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 34 [Summer 2008], 219–292, is confused on this very point, for Burnyeat wrongly categorizes Aristotle's examples; the examples that clearly read to be instances of activity Burnyeat takes to be instances of motion, and vice versa. So Burnyeat: "Examples under the second heading, the one Q is really interested in, are the Hermes in the wood, the half-line in the whole (1048b32–35), the matter as opposed to what is separated out of it, and the unworked up as opposed to what it is worked up into (1048b3–4). The disturbing bit is the examples Aristotle cites under the first head, as *δύναμις* to *κίνησις*: knowledge vs. contemplation, the craft of building vs. buiding, sleeping vs. waking, sight vs. seeing (1048a34–b2)." Understandably disturbing if you put things that way, but that is because Burnyeat's description is a nonstarter; he has things exactly backward. As far as I can see, what leads him to this confusion is the fact that Aristotle lists *building* as an instance of *energeia,* when it is so obviously an instance of a kinesis. But the example Aristotle cites makes clear what is at work; *building* is introduced relative to *the skill of building* and not therefore as an instance of a kinesis except accidentally. Look at the quotation from *De Anima* 417b8–11 and the surrounding discussion in Chapter 2 on pages 65–66. As a result, Burnyeat reads each mention of building as a mention of an example of change, and is led to reverse the order of introduction in this passage. Much of his argument depends upon this reversal and dissolves once this is made clear.
6. Alexander Aphrodisias, *In Aristotelis Metaphysica Commentaria* (*Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca,* V.I), ed. M. Hayduck (Berlin, 1891), 580.3ff.
7. *Metaphysics* 8.4, 1044a35; *Metaphysics* 7.8, 1033a25; *Generation of Animals* 1.21, 730a27; I have given a clear description and explanation of an Aristotelian theory of animal generation in an essay, "Male and Female in Aristotle's *Generation of Animals,*" in *Being, Nature, and Life in Aristotle: Essays in Honor of Allan Gotthelf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 147–167.
8. This is clear in Alexander's discussion of the opening of Book 9, *In Aristotelis Metaphysica Commentaria,* 565.1ff. See also Asclepius, *In Aristotelis Metaphysicorum Libros A–Z Commentaria* (*Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca,* VI.II), ed. M. Hayduck (Berlin, 1883), 375.12ff, and H. Bonitz, *Aristotelis Metaphysica* (Bonn, 1868), 378. Alexander's understanding is taken up by much of the subsequent tradition; see, for example, Bonitz, *Aristotelis Metaphysica,* 393.
9. Here I follow the reading of Alexander and Bonitz; the manuscripts all give the somewhat stronger *μορφὴ ὅτι ἐνέργρεια*.
10. The actual conversation is at Exodus 3:13–14. God's words there are best translated as "I will be what I will be." The verb *to be* is in the Hebrew imperfective, which is less tensed than English future and more durative.

4. THE ACTIVITY OF LIVING BEING

1. By indicating that *animal* here means "living being" I mean to make clear that the discussion we are about to have is about living things in general, plants as well as what we more generally call animals.
2. See also *Metaphysics* 8.2, 1043a4; 8.3, 1043b22–23.
3. See, for example, P. F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959).
4. Christopher Shields argues explicitly for such a view in his commentary on an essay of mine on Aristotle's notion of god, *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy,* III, 1987, ed. John Cleary (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 189–201. He there claims (a) that according to Aristotle if Socrates is an *οὐσία*, and Socrates is a white human, then a white human is an *οὐσία*. Indeed, (b) if Socrates is white and a substance, then it will be true (if misleading) to say that a white thing (*τὸ λευκόν*) is an *οὐσία*. And (c) if some feature of Aristotle's ontology had the consequence that *x* could be numerically identical to *y* without sharing all of *y*'s properties, then there would be something seriously wrong with his ontology (193). But all this subtly begs the question, for it depends upon the implicit claim that *οὐσία* specifies a being of the same logical type as the properties being white or being human, rather than specifying a mode of being—a substance rather than a quality. Only then would the specification of substance specify a kind of thing, such as would allow transparent reference, and thus allow Shields's conclusion to follow. Shields in fact does think that there is something important in the claim that *τὸ φ εἶναι* may not be the same as *τὸ ψ εἶναι* even when *φ* and *ψ* pick out the same individual. But this means that one and the same entity can fall under different descriptions; indeed, as we will see, when he claims that *τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι* is not the same as *τὸ λευκῷ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*, Aristotle means that one entity, one human, can fall under different descriptions, including some that specify substance and others that do not. Being a white man is not a substance, although being a man is, even when the man is a white man.
5. For a list of Aristotle's uses of this locution, see H. Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus* (Berlin, 1870), 221a40–61. Aristotle's point is recognized in other traditions; the White Horse Paradox of the *Kung-Sun Lung Tzu* is an instance. "A white horse is not a horse; 白 馬 非 馬"; why is this? The argument appeals precisely to those features of *being a horse* and of *being white* that make it true that *being a white horse* is not the same thing as *being a horse.* See Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 235–237.
6. See Mohan Matthen, "Teleology in Living Things," in *A Companion to Aristotle,* ed. Giorgios Anagnostopoulos (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 335–336.
7. By *trivial*, I mean here uninformative except formally. In Chapter 5, I will explain this notion in more detail and suggest the role that questions and answers of this sort come to play in Aristotle's technical terminology, particularly questions of the form, what is it for this thing to be a threshold?—*τί ἐστιν αὐτῷ τὸ οὐδῷ εἶναι*?
8. I use *menses* here as a translation of Aristotle's *καταμήνια*, which like *menses* strictly refers only to the monthly menstrual flow of humans, and most of Aristotle's exam-

ples are in fact of human menses. But Aristotle commonly uses the term as well to apply to the estrous discharge of nonprimate animals. Cf. *Generation of Animals* 1.19, 727a21; 3.1, 750b12; *History of Animals* 3.19, 521a26; see Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus,* 327b23ff.

9. The discussion of the sexes in *Generation of Animals* is actually more complicated. See the article I cited earlier, "Male and Female in Aristotle's *Generation of Animals*" in *Being, Nature, and Life in Aristotle*, ed. James Lennox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 147–167.
10. See also *Eudemian Ethics* 7.9, 1241b22.
11. *Quaestiones* 54.9 and *De Anima* 16.11ff.
12. See, for example, *Parts of Animals* 2.1, 646b26; 3.1, 661b29; *Generation of Animals* 2.4, 739b14; 2.6, 742b10; *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.1, 1110a16. See Stephen Menn, "Aristotle's Definition of Soul and the Programme of the *De Anima,*" *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 22 (2002), 83–139
13. In fact, animals are not strictly speaking *made out* of anything at all; they are grown from seed. But this is another story.
14. See Chapter 1, page 35.
15. Imagining an axe to be alive is not imagining it to do everything that an animal does. It is just Aristotle's point that lacking dedicated organs, an axe could not see, hear, breathe, and so on, unless we were to adopt the most matter-independent form of functionalism conceivable. And however much we might conceive of an Aristotle who was a functionalist at the bottom level—why not silicone eyes or metal membranes? (although it does not take that long to figure why not)—it is not the same to conceive of an Aristotelian biology without the organs of animal life—pewter that sees with no articulate differentiation in its makeup, or cotton that hears. But Aristotle's counterfactual here, though still not trivially counterfactual, is simpler. An axe has a sharp edge and a weighted head; suppose, then, that it could split wood by itself and of its own accord, anticipating our wishes. This is to suppose that woodcutting were automated; in such circumstances, Aristotle elsewhere speculates, a servant class would no longer be necessary. *Politics* 1.4, 1253b33–1254a1.
16. Synecdoche is, to be sure, a *literary device* or *trope,* but it is not thereby a mere "figure of speech"; it is an instrument of theory. Citing an earlier use of mine of this term, Jonathan Beere, in his study that I mentioned in the Preface (xxiii), *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta* (180), worries because I think that according to Aristotle "*energeia* 'figures' being and is the 'ruling metaphor' for it." Beere thinks that "maybe [Kosman is] right, but if so, Aristotle is wrong, because Aristotle did not understand his claims about being and *energeia* as a figure of speech." I am not sure that I understand this exactly, but I want to mention it in any case to stress that in what I here and elsewhere say, I want *rhetorical* to concern a presentation of *thinking.* These terms *(figure, trope, metaphor, synecdoche)* and others like them are devices of conceptual and theoretical strategy, not mere *façons de parler.*
17. This is why Aristotle claims that outside the actual unity of substance-being the elements, like the parts of animals, are only capacities—*dunameis*—for the fully realized substantial being that is animal life: *Metaphysics* 7.16, 1040b5–9. Myles Burn-

yeat makes a similar point in "Is Aristotle's Philosophy of Mind Still Tenable?" in *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima,* ed. A. Rorty and M. Nussbaum (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 15–26.

5. WHAT SOMETHING IS

1. I say "usually" because it is important, as I have urged, to recall that there are for Aristotle other and equally significant discriminations to be made within the concept of being. One that we have especially attended to, and which we will look at again in this chapter, is that between being that belongs to a subject accidentally and being that belongs to it by virtue of itself.
2. The author is Gilbert Ryle, "Categories," in *Logic and Language,* second series, ed. A. G. Flew (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), 66, but he is not alone in this view of the origin of Aristotle's categories.
3. W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 1:lxxxiv.
4. For references to the categories sometimes as *γένη τῶν ὄντων* and sometimes as *γένη τῶν κατηγοριῶν* see H. Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus* (Berlin, 1870), 378a5–45.
5. W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics,* 1:lxxiii
6. Compare J. H. Randall Jr., *Aristotle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 117: "I ask, 'What is this thing, this *ousia?*' *(ti esti?)*"
7. That there is no predication of good or real without specifying the nature of the subject that is said to be good or real does not, of course, entail that such specification must be explicit. When, as often happens, we say of some subject that it is good or real without further qualification, we most often understand, unless the context demands otherwise, a sortal predicate specifying what the subject is in what we will see to be for Aristotle a strong sense of *what.* If I say that Abrams is good, and insist that I do not mean a good philosopher or dancer, but just good: honest, considerate, and so on, then I may be taken to mean that she is a good human being.
8. The first of these is from a poem by John Hollander rescuing a phrase of Noam Chomsky: *Coiled Alizarine,* John Hollander, *The Night Mirror* (New York: Atheneum, 1971); the second is from a sonnet of Dylan Thomas: "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower," in *The Poems of Dylan Thomas,* ed. Daniel Jones (New York: New Directions, 1971), 77.
9. It is facts such as these that we exploit in the zeugma. The delight Pope gives us at Ariel's concern lest a maiden "stain her honor or her new brocade" and at the thought that Queen Anne "would sometimes counsel take and sometimes tea" comes from the humorous mixing of the categorically different. Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock,* II.20, I.72, III.8.
10. Although perhaps there could be no thought or language that did not at least make possible such an activity and perhaps therefore a robust theory of logic and language will need to inquire into the relation between a proposition's significance and our ability to assert or to consider or to raise questions about it. See *On Interpretation* 4, 17a3–5.

11. See also *Posterior Analytics* 1.2, 72a13; *Categories* 4, 2a7; *On Interpretation* 4, 17a3–5.
12. A similar argument is given by David Wiggins, "Identity-Statements," in *Analytical Philosophy,* Second Series, ed. R. J. Butler (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 44.
13. This is the argument, for example, of P. F. Strawson in *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959), particularly Part 1.
14. My spelling here is intended to distance these fantasies from the actual complex views of these pre-Socratics. The discussion here has obvious affinities both to Plato's discussions, particularly in the *Theatetus* and *Sophist,* and to Aristotle's complex and rich arguments in *Metaphysics* 4.4, which requires a much longer discussion.
15. Pappadopoulos's ignorance may remind us of the connections between the distinction I am here making and issues in reference theory. Recall, for instance, this frequently discussed paradox. Suppose that Abrams does not know that the color of her house is white; say Pappadopoulos has painted it white for her as a surprise while she was on vacation. Would we then be justified, given that (a) the color of Abrams's house is white but that (b) she does not know that the color of her house is white to conclude that (c) Abrams does not know that white is white? We know how to treat this flimsy but revealing paradox, and how to assuage any fear it may occasion about Abrams's command of color concepts, and we know the important and interesting issues that it raises about reference.
16. See also *Posterior Analytics* 1.22, 83a28–30; *Topics* 3.1, 116a27; 4.1, 120b23; and the claim at *Categories* 5, 2a27–33, that the name but not the definition of a quality is predicable of a substance.
17. The brief but complex discussion in this chapter of the *Metaphysics* is another version of the argument I have been attributing to Aristotle.

6. SOMETHING'S BEING WHAT IT IS

1. Consider only the recent Revised Oxford Translation, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984): here, for example, we encounter "essence" as a translation of *τὸ τί ἐστι* in the *Topics,* e.g., 1.5, 101b37, in a number of places in the biological writings, e.g., *Generation of Animals* 2.1, 731b20; 2.6, 742b33 and in the opening of the *Metaphysics,* 1.10, 993a18. But later in the *Metaphysics,* and in a number of other contexts, we find *τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι* rendered by "the essence of man" (7.6, 1031a25) and *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* rendered simply by "essence" (7.6, 1031a15).
2. I realize that it may be odd to call this response *standard*. The question I've imagined may ordinarily occur in contexts that would generate a less general response: *Abrams is a marine biologist,* and so not likely to be of help on this problem.
3. For example, *De Anima* 3.2, 426a1–18; 2.12, 424a25. For a complete list of such expressions, see H. Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus* (Berlin, 1870), 221a40–61.
4. The equivalence of *τί ἦν* and *τί ἐστι* suggests an answer to the question of why we find Aristotle constructing this technical phrase as *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* rather than as *τὸ τί*

ἐστι εἶναι. Because both the imperfect of *τί ἦν* and the present of *τί ἐστι* exhibit the imperfective, the aspect of verbs that designate actions that are ongoing without the completion of the perfect, I do not think much can be made of the distinction, although Christopher Long, in *Aristotle on the Nature of Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 192, makes a determined and thoughtful effort. Long argues that "the imperfect carries with it progressive aspect in past time, and . . . the phrase itself points to a certain temporality, for while the infinitive affirms the very presence of the being under consideration, the imperfect, with its progressive aspect, signifies that this presence is always already somehow past." Most other people think that the difference is not temporal; Patzig and Frede like the idea that *τί ἦν* gives a logical priority to the phrase, Michael Frede and Günther Patzig, *"Metaphysik Z" Einleitung, Text und Übersetzung* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1988) I, 35.

5. This explanation contrasts with those that read Aristotle's technical phrase as a more direct analogue of *τὸ τί ἐστι*, formed by nominalization with respect to an imagined question *τί ἦν εἶναι*.
6. W. V. O. Quine, "Three Grades of Modal Involvement," in *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 175–176.
7. In this form, the question will seem more familiar, resembling questions such as whether Marx was a Marxist, Plato a Platonist, or Freud a Freudian. Such questions interest us not so much because they repudiate revisionism as because they call into question the faithfulness of eponymy and thus the arch-myth of discipleship, the myth that in continuing the tradition of our ancestors we perpetuate their actual beliefs and practices. And there is always, as here, the contrary fear of the faithful that the eponym has been misappropriated; "Aristotelian essentialism," in other words, may be like Donne's "Pharisaicall Dissemblers," ("Holy Sonnets" VIII) a phrase that none of us who continue the religion of the Pharisees much like to think applies to us.
8. Here "Aristotelian-style" is meant to operate like "kosher-style," which, as it happens, is rarely kosher.
9. This issue is indeed a complex one that involves many other vexed questions. Among these, for example, is the question of *de re* and *de dicto* necessity. I think it can be shown that the complexities of Aristotle's modal logic can be accounted for without invoking a concept of *de re* necessity; I have argued for this view in "Necessity and Explanation in Aristotle's *Analytics*," in *Biologie, Logique, et Métaphysique chez Aristotle: actes du séminaire C.N.R.S.-N.S.F., Oléron 28 juin-3 juillet 1987,* ed. D. Devereux and P. Pellegrin (Paris: Éditions du C.N.R.S., 1990), 349–364.
10. Alexander, *In Aristotelis Metaphysica Commentaria* (*Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca,* I), ed. M. Hayduck (Berlin, 1891), 580.3ff. Alexander may have been influenced in his understanding by Aristotle's description, in the context of a very different sort of argument at *Metaphysics* 8.4, 1044a34–35, of the *καταμήνια* as "*ἀνθρώπου τις αἰτία ὡς ὕλη*." But the misunderstanding is connected with a more general misunderstanding according to which Aristotle has completed the analysis of *ousia* by the beginning of Book 9 and turns at that point to a related but independent discussion of *dunamis* and *energeia*.

11. As long as we do not see this, we will be correct to be bothered by the worries about motion-like features of *energeia* raised by John Ackrill in "Aristotle's Distinction between *Energeia* and *Kinesis,*" in J. L. Ackrill, *Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 142–162. Ackrill generates these worries by pointing to entities that are first described as modes of *energeia* and then making trouble by redescribing these *energeiai* as motions.

7. THE FIRST MOVER

1. The master of such views is Werner Jaeger, particularly in his book *Aristoteles: Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1923); English trans. Richard Robinson, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934).
2. This suggestion is also made, although in a different form, by Günther Patzig in "Theologie und Ontologie in der 'Metaphysik' des Aristoteles," *Kantstudien* 52 (1960–1961): 185ff. (reprinted in *Articles on Aristotle: 3. Metaphysics,* ed. J. Barnes, M. Schofield, and R. Sorabji [London: St. Martin's Press, 1979]), 33ff. I do not think that Patzig is right that the *πρὸς ἕν* structure—the unity that being has by virtue of being said with reference to one sense—is explicitly reproduced in Book 12; my suggestion is merely that first substance is some sort of explanatory principle of substance.
3. W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Oxford:, 1924), 1:xxviii.
4. This passage is worth citing if only because it provides one example (I will cite another example in a moment) of what may lie behind Cicero's reference to Aristotle's "suavitas et brevitas" (*De Inventione* 2.2.6) and his description of Aristotle as one of those who are "eloquentes et in dicendo suaves atque ornati" (*De Oratore* 1.2.49), a testimony that readers of the crabbed and often graceless prose of the *Metaphysics* might find surprising.
5. Herman Deils and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1952); in English, Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Fragments in Diels Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 2A11, 13B2, 18B21. Also, P*hysics* 3.4, 203b11.
6. This view, according to which the outer sphere's circular motion is natural, may itself differ from what Cicero reports to be Aristotle's view. On that view, the movement of the stars is contrasted to the natural movement of the light and the heavy and is said to be "voluntary" (*De Natura Deorum* 2.16.44). It is generally assumed (perhaps on slight grounds) that Cicero is here relying (as in several other attributions to Aristotle later in the *De Natura Deorum*) on a much earlier work of Aristotle's, his lost *De Philosophia,* which Cicero mentions by name earlier at 1.13.33.
7. W. D. Ross, *The Development of Aristotle's Thought, Proceedings of the British Academy* 43 (1957): 75. Cf. also W. K. C. Guthrie, introduction to Aristotle, *On the Heav-*

ens, trans. W. K. C. Guthrie (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) and "The Development of Aristotle's Theology," *Classical Quarterly* 27, 3–4 (1933): 162–171 and 28, 2 (1934): 90–98.

8. So, for example, David Furley, "Self-Movers," in *Aristotle on Mind and the Senses,* Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium Aristotelicum, ed. G. E. R. Lloyd and G. E. L Owen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 165–179; Mary Louise Gill, "Aristotle on Self-Motion," in *Aristotle's Physics: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Lindsay Judson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 243–265.
9. Compare *Motion of Animals* 1, 698a8–11 and *Physics* 8.7, 261a25–27.
10. As Aristotle explains at *De Caelo* 1.9, 278b10–22, he means *οὐρανός* to refer at once to the outermost circumference of the world, to the body next to that circumference, and to the world surrounded by it.
11. Consider, for example, the role of space and time in the elaborate medieval discussions concerning the creation and eternity of the universe, e.g., Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 2.13–26, and Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.1.46.
12. This fact, we may recall, is the source of one of Aristotle's central criticisms of prior theories of the soul in the *De Anima* (1.2, 403b28–31 and 404a20–24).
13. As Gertrude Stein once said, "there's no there there," although she was speaking of Oakland rather than Heaven.
14. See *On Generation and Corruption* 2.11, 338a17–20 and *Phaedo* 72B.
15. Herman Deils and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Parmenides 28.B1.29).
16. The exact words are from *Metaphysics* 8.3, 1043b3, but the strategy is ubiquitous and typical.

8. DIVINE BEING AND THOUGHT

1. I have argued for this way of putting it in "Predicating the Good," *Phronesis* 13, no. 2 (1968) 171–174. Aristotle intends to say in this passage not that the meaning of *good* is determined in a certain way when we predicate it of God and mind, but rather that when we say that *what something is* is God and mind, we predicate *good* of it in a certain way.
2. The first thought is the suggestion of W. D. Ross in *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), 2:379. The second is the suggestion of Alexander Aphrodesiensis, *In Aristotelis Metaphysica Commentaria* (*Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* I), ed. M. Hayduck (Berlin, 1881), 697.9f.
3. Simplicius, *Commentarius in IV libros Aristotelis De caelo (Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca XV),* 485.19–22. Compare *Eudemian Ethics* 7.14, 1248a27.
4. *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta,* ed. August Nauck (Leipzig: Teubner, 1856), frag. 1018; *The Fragments of Sophocles,* ed. A. C. Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917), frag. 922.
5. Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 695.

6. Bonaventure, *Itinerarum mentis in deum,* chapter 2; here Bonaventure offers an array of figures for worldly things as signs of the divine, of which *vestigia*—footprints—becomes the most prominent.
7. I have argued for a view like this in "What Does the Maker Mind Make? The Role of Aristotle's *Nous Poetikos*" in *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima,* ed. A. Rorty and M. Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 343–358.
8. In this respect I agree with the reading of Richard Norman in his essay "Aristotle's Philosopher-God," *Phronesis* 14, no.1 (1969), 63–74.
9. Leo Elders, *Aristotle's Theology: A Commentary on Book L of the* Metaphysics (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972), 262–263.
10. I believe that Alexius Meinong supposed the former, but I no longer remember where; Norman the latter in "Aristotle's Philosopher-God," *Phronesis* 14 (1969): 63. But the thought can be found throughout discussions, even sympathetic discussions, of Aristotle's theology.
11. This view is discussed in the second chapter of Stephen Salkever, *Finding the Mean: Theory and Practice in Aristotelian Political Philosophy.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 57–104.
12. Following the manuscript reading *αἰσθανόμεθ' ἄν ὅτι αἰσθανοίμεθα καὶ νοοῖμεν ὅτι νοοῦμεν* rather than Bywater's emendation.
13. *Charmides* 170a6. I spell this out in greater length in my contribution to the Keeling Colloquium for 2009, "Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato's *Charmides,*" forthcoming in the proceedings of that colloquium to be titled *Self-Knowledge in Ancient Philosophy.*

9. THE ACTIVITY OF BEING

1. I am told that young gray horses may sometimes be mistaken for roans, but that is an epistemological modality rather than what we are here interested in.
2. Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Frankfurt: Klosterman, 1975), 322.
3. Ludwig Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics," *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 3–12.

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